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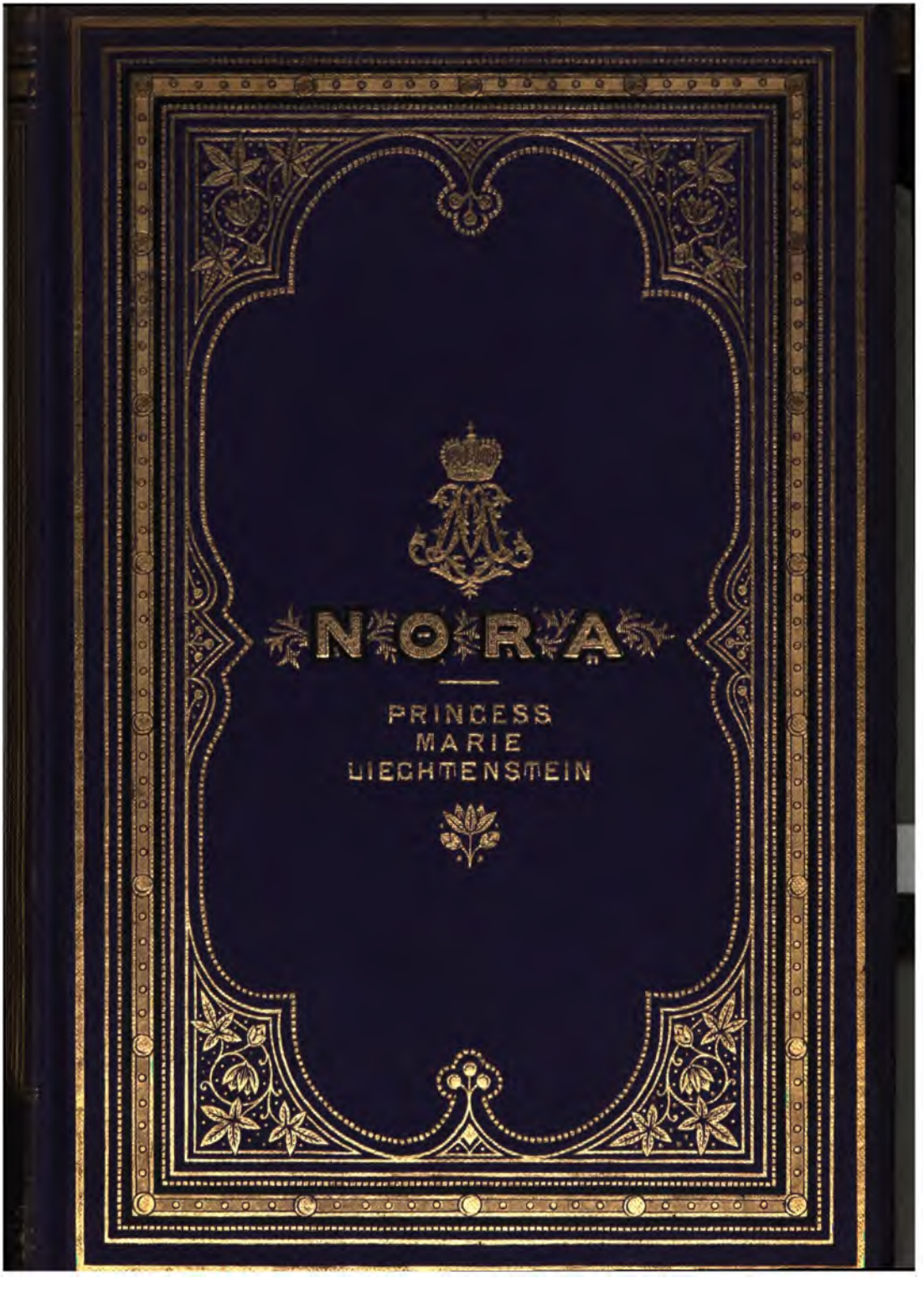
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MARIE
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Ballantyne Press
BALLANTYNE, HANSON AND CO.
EDINBURGH AND LONDON

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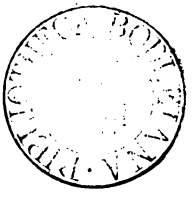
A NOVEL TAKEN FROM THE GERMAN

BY

PRINCESS MARIE LIECHTENSTEIN



LONDON
BURNS & OATES,
PORTMAN STREET AND PATERNOSTER ROW.
1877

251. d. 879.

PREFACE.

IT has often been said, and with reason, that a novel written with a marked tendency—religious or political—is tedious.

If we want instruction or enlightenment, we had rather seek both in *bonâ fide* treatises, than have to wade through long controversial dialogues, or be preached at by a novel-writer. We take up a novel in a moment of leisure, when we feel unfitted for more serious study, and we seek to be amused or touched.

On the other hand, it is natural that those authors whose noble desire is to gain admiration for their Faith, by showing it under its real colours — in its beneficial influence upon daily life—should not give up the task because they do not feel equal to deeper or more serious works.

The difficulty has been got over by Lady Georgiana Fullerton in England, by Mrs. Craven in France, and we may now add, by Ferdinande Freün von Brackel in Germany.

Our task was a very humble one, but we undertook it with pleasure, and have endeavoured to retain, as far as the idiosyncrasies of language permitted, the conceptions of the Authoress.

We now bring it confidently before the English public, hoping that it will appeal to the hearts of Catholics, and, as it is free from all controversy, we trust it may be read and liked by Protestants.

MARY P^ss^ LIECHTENSTEIN.

SCHLOSS BURGSTALL,
April 1877.

CHAPTER I.

IN one of the smartest apartments of the *Hôtel Impérial* at Geneva, a young woman lay upon a sofa. Her head was covered by a black veil, and, as she leant back against the crimson cushions, her fair locks falling softly and plentifully around her, her hands resting with indolent grace upon her lap, she presented, if not a beautiful, at all events a very pleasing picture. She did not seem strong, and had that delicate bloom which, in women as in plants, is ephemeral.

Her apparent repose could only be caused by fatigue; for her looks wandered anxiously across the room, turning inquiringly towards the door at every sound, and then falling impatiently upon a travelling clock which stood on a small table at her side. As the needle moved slowly forward, she could no longer master her agitation; and, raising herself half up, she called to a middle-aged woman who was busy in the next room, and whose broad figure was visible at times through the open door.

"Hannah," she called, and notwithstanding her effort, the voice had not much sound. "Hannah, is Miss Nora not come home yet?"

"Little miss is with master," said the woman in broken German. Her brown complexion and her peculiar

cast of features showed that she was not of European origin. "Little miss quite safe with master; missus have no reason to fear," she added soothingly; "will come surely when it's time. Director never home before eleven o'clock."

"He has certainly taken her once more to that place," whispered the young woman to herself. "He does not know what he is doing; I must talk to him about it. Oh, my poor child!"

Was it the whispered tone in which she had spoken these last words?—was it excitement?—but a violent, dry cough interrupted her, and shook her so that her head sank back exhausted among the pillows.

"Why missus excite herself unnecessary?" scolded the woman. "Missus make herself ill, and then master will be angry. When missus was still a girl, was always so sweet and patient, but now she burns up like flames of fire."

"At that time I had no one to worry about, my good old Hannah. Mamma and you took care of me; and then I was in good health," she added with a sigh.

"Could also be healthy now, if you would," grumbled the old servant. "But agitated life wearies so."

"No, it is not the life I lead; I am surrounded by so much kindness. It is here," she said, and pressed her hand to her chest. "Added to which, this gnawing preoccupation does me no good. But listen, Hannah, there they come," she added with more animation.

Rapid and light footsteps were heard. At the same moment the door was opened, and a little girl came rushing in, and threw herself upon her mother's knees.

"Mamma, mamma! I can do it beautifully," she screamed, breathless; "I have ridden standing like Miss Elise, and have sprung through the hoop!"

"How heated you are, my Nora!" said the mother, pushing her brown hair back from her forehead. "O

Alfred! you took her there again, after all!" she said, turning with a tone of reproach to the tall and stately-looking man, who had followed immediately upon the child.

"How are you, my darling?" he asked tenderly, and leant affectionately over her, imprinting a kiss upon her brow, without noticing her remark.

"O Alfred!" she repeated, and looked at him sadly.

He shrugged his shoulders, and turned impatiently away. The little one, however, seized her mother's face with both her hands, and, turning it towards her, continued her chattering.

"Mamma, do listen to me; I have sprung through the hoop much better than the little Wimbleton child, who very nearly fell down."

"You must take off your things, Nora," interrupted the father; "go with Hannah and let her help you."

"Directly, papa, but listen first, mamma. When we came into the Circus, papa placed me on the new pony"——

"Helen! How can you be so foolish as to keep the child back?" said the man angrily. "Nora! I told you already once to go away."

"Go, my pet," said the mother; "you can tell me about it later." The child, frightened by her father's unusually severe tone, obeyed, and left the room.

The young wife still leant backwards, whilst her husband remained standing at the window. "Alfred," she said softly, after a pause, and as he turned round, she held out her hand to him.

He seized it and pressed it to his lips. "Shall we make it up?" he asked, and his dark eyes looked at her with a roguish expression.

"Oh, come here. I have not had you to myself for such an age," she said tenderly, holding him fast.

He brought a chair to her side and sat down by the sofa, so that he might place his arm round her waist, and that her head could rest on his shoulder.

"I am in for a sermon, anyhow," he began again, half jokingly; "and a good long one, as I cannot run away from you. I have read its text already in your eyes: Why did you take Nora with you?"

"You have read aright," she replied. "Yes, why do you do it when I have begged you not?"

"Ah, you women are dreadful with your whys and wherefores. Well, simply because I cannot resist it. The child has a remarkable talent for it; she is as graceful as a nymph, and as daring as a man. Why should I not give myself the pleasure of instructing her in my art? She will be first-rate," he continued enthusiastically.

"My daughter a circus-rider!" cried out Helen sorrowfully.

"You have married a circus-rider."

"Oh! That is quite another thing. A man can raise any vocation to the height he chooses. Adverse circumstances forced you to it. You have had the talent of turning so useless an amusement into a science," and she looked proudly at her husband.

"Adverse circumstances forced me to it. Yes; but who can say that anything would have suited me half so well in the long run as this free and independent life?"

"You used to think otherwise," she threw in gently.

"When? You mean during the time I courted you? Yes! When the future was not yet assured; when many of the old wounds bled afresh, and when the present placed the worth of what I had lost in the most striking contrast. Then I certainly did hate my calling," he said, and passed his hands over his eyes, as if to shut out dark visions; "but now," he continued after a pause, "all that has been long forgotten."

She looked shyly at him, and said, "What could have induced you, with your education and learning, to choose so singular a profession?"

"So singular a profession," he repeated bitterly. "You express it as delicately as possible. Well! Perhaps it lay in my own nature. You have not much of Eve's inheritance, curiosity, dear, that you have asked so little about my past. Were you afraid of doing so?" he added hesitatingly.

"No," she said quietly; "distrust and love cannot live in the same heart. The past belonged to you, the present and the future were mine, and that sufficed."

There was something intensely touching in the simple trust implied by these words. "My sweet little wife!" he said fondly, and pressed a kiss upon her forehead. "Helen," he then continued more seriously, "my silence was not imposed by the necessity of concealment; for although there have been many dark hours in my life, there have been none I need be ashamed of. My vocation has been a mistaken one—the result of not feeling satisfied with the state of life God had placed me in. You know that the name I bear is not my own. My father was of a noble French family, and the fiery blood which flowed in my veins must have been inherited from him. He belonged to the few of those nobles who joined the cause of the Revolution. In the subsequent wars, and during his long residence in Germany, he married there, and was killed in battle, leaving my mother an almost penniless widow with three children. My remembrance of the first years I spent at home is not happy. The contrasts were too great, the elements too different, and our poverty weighed heavily upon us. I had a decided taste for the military career, so that my mother's relations, who belonged to the higher military and lawyer class, effected my entrance into a military college, where I was educated by the king's

favour. My temper was too hot and violent for my mother. What had charmed her once in her husband, alarmed her in her son—her quiet nature could not understand my fiery one. At college, on the contrary, my French name, my foreign appearance and liveliness, gained me friends in a short time. It is extraordinary that the Germans, who dislike the French as a nation, are completely under their individual charm. I shone in the midst of the slower and quieter youths. My quickness of comprehension, my adroitness, and my easily awakened ambition, made me the favourite of my masters. They, unfortunately, termed my mad tricks clever and high-spirited, so that I considered myself early destined to something very remarkable, and thought highly of the French qualities I had inherited. Had the time which followed been an active one, I might, perhaps, have done something worth speaking of. But they were years of peace; and the pedantic service in a little garrison, coupled with a portionless lieutenant's small income, did not answer exactly to the ideal of my heroic dreams. I now appreciate that severe discipline, and fully recognise its merits, but then it was unbearable, and I gnawed the bit impatiently. I had, however, no choice, as that career was the only one by which I could gain an assured position in life. The man immediately over me was, perhaps, more particular than was necessary in small things. He had served in the war of freedom, and consequently hated my French vanity. He let no occasion pass in which to make me feel his superiority. I have a mixture of the faults of both nations"——

"But also of their virtues. You have a German heart," interrupted Helen lovingly.

"Anyhow, German obstinacy. Under a severe and hard rule, which I considered unjust, my long-nursed anger broke out. I considered myself insulted, and de-

manded satisfaction at my superior's hands. He refused on the strength of the position we stood in towards each other in the service, and my pretension only gained for me renewed severity. No longer master of myself, I took the first opportunity of showing him my contempt when off service, so that it now was his turn to ask satisfaction from me. We shot at each other. My ball, unfortunately, hit him, and he died the same night. At that time the law against duelling was enforced to the letter, so that I could no longer remain in the army, nor even in my own country. My friends helped my evasion, and I escaped to another hemisphere. At first I had only the delicious feeling of regained liberty. I was young, gifted with a lively imagination, and a new world opened itself to my eyes. But I soon realised the bitter truth. I was without means, and had nothing to help me on but my own personal strength. My education as well as my disposition only fitted me for a position already made. I did not know how to start anything. Too good for many things; in reality, good for very little—that is the description of an adventurer. After toiling painfully for my existence in the humblest capacities, I became casually acquainted with a set of hunters, who used to try their luck amongst those large territories inhabited by wild horses, in catching them. That was quite in my line. I joined them—a set of coarse, wild people, thrown together out of the most different stations of life. My dexterity in riding and shooting soon gained me their consideration. It was in taming wild horses that I first recognised my talent for training them. I learnt a good deal from my companions, who had long pursued this occupation, and a good deal also from the Indians, with whom we were in continual contact during our frequent excursions across the prairies. Some of the tricks which now charm the public were first taught me by red men. Thus many years went by. One

year, the chase was rendered impracticable and dangerous by the warlike attitude of some Indian tribes. A few of my companions, thorough Yankees, hit upon the idea of turning the training of our horses to account. The idea sprang up in an idle hour, and we agreed to it, as we could find no better one. Our first attempt, in a small American town, was so far beyond our expectations, that we made up our minds to continue the enterprise. These sort of representations, primitive as they were, were completely new in those parts. My recollection of the same sort of thing in our country was of great use to us. At one time my inventive power was admired, at another the training and the beauty of our horses; or, again, the reckless daring of our men. Thus we travelled from one town to another, winning both money and fame; for, as you know, once raise the American's curiosity and admiration, and they know no bounds. So long as we gave our representations at small towns, in the presence of an uneducated public, I did not feel the strangeness of my position much; I was too hardened by the last years I had spent in complete independence from all social restrictions. But when we arrived in civilised towns, when I saw amongst my audience people from the ranks of which I myself had sprung, an inexpressible feeling of shame arose in me. I felt it all the more bitterly on seeing what had for me become quite a novel apparition, women surrounded by all the charms of virtue and of good breeding, and, above all, when I saw your dear little face amongst the ladies who attended our representations. In that moment I realised all that I had lost, by taking a name and entering upon a career which excluded me from the society of my equals. I was indescribably miserable. It was the custom there as here, for fashionable young men to come to our Circus in the morning. It was thus that I made your brother's acquaintance, and his likeness to you at once attracted me

towards him. At the sale of a horse we came into closer contact, and he, recognising in me a man of good breeding, was particularly friendly in his manner. It was a pleasant feeling to find myself once more with a gentleman. The sudden change of condition being, as you know, very frequent in America, people are not particular about such things, and when Tom had learnt part of my history, he became a staunch friend to me. I had earned enough to be able to keep up my position in society where your brother introduced me. There I made your acquaintance, Helen, and, thanks to American freedom, I was able to see much of you.

"The rest you know, darling," continued Alfred; "you, who so nobly fought our love's battle, raising one who had fallen in his own estimation. Your devotion and constancy, dear, have saved me from the despair I was in at not being able to propose to you in my former name and position. Naturally enough, your parents only saw in me the adventurer, the man earning a precarious livelihood. I did what I could on my side, placing myself at the head of the undertaking, in order to bring it forward by putting it upon a large scale. My quondam companions had long since recognised that I was the centre of the whole thing, and that it was I who led them by my wits. I had, therefore, no difficulty in settling the matter with them, and my project was crowned with success. As proprietor of a troop, I felt myself on safe ground; I knew what I could arrive at. I have had the joy of giving you the position my love had dreamt for you, and to surround you with all the comfort you could possibly require. And we have been happy, darling, haven't we?" he said, looking tenderly at her.

"Ah! almost too happy," she whispered, nestling closer by him.

"No! not too happy," he said. "Destiny cannot be

jealous, for it was I who first threw the ring into the stream. But I have no reason to quarrel with fate either. Both the French spirit of adventure, and the German love of home, have been satisfied, and I have found quiet, domestic happiness in the very midst of my adventures. So now, my pet, don't be anxious about the future. Won't you trust me to steer the ship I have set afloat?"

He spoke with all the consciousness of the self-made man, and who, owing nothing either to other people or to surrounding circumstances, has confidence only in himself.

"Nora!" said his wife, after a short pause, averting her look from him, and blushing the while.

A cloud passed over his brow.

"You women are dreadfully obstinate, always coming back to the same thing. Why on earth are you worrying yourself about the child?"

"Alfred, you are awaking in her the taste for riding!"

He laughed uncomfortably. "You have time enough to worry yourself over your daughter's inclinations. And what harm is there in her being fond of the noble animal, to whom her father owes both wealth and fame? As I said before, those things run in the blood. You can't expect me to think otherwise upon the subject. Let me guide and develop her talent; she shall appear at my side, and gain more applause than any one else. If it is a peculiar career, you see that it is not one which stands in the way of happiness!"

"Alfred! you can't really mean it!" exclaimed Helen, starting up upon her couch. "You can't destine your child, my daughter, to such a life! Is it for this that you have given me an account of your career? A man's career is so different from that of a woman's! As I said before, she remains unavoidably attached and bound up with the posi-

tion in which she has once been placed. And, honestly, what is the position of the woman who shows herself for money to a gaping crowd? Its plaything to-day, the thing it despises to-morrow! Never! I am ill and weak, but I shall know how to defend, how to save my child!" —and a look of such dauntless energy and determination flashed in the usually soft blue eyes, that Karsten drew back awe-struck.

"Helen! you are feverish!" he cried; "what do you want to defend your child from—what danger is your foolish little head dreaming of? She remains under your protection. Educate her to be as good and as gentle as you yourself are, and let us await coming events in peace and quiet."

"Under my protection!" and Helen raised her thin, transparent, white hands to the light. "Educate her to be gentle and good, say you," she continued, in an uneasy tone. "No! don't say that! don't say that! If you intend her to lead that life, then take her with you to-day at once. Let her mix up with those people, so that her feelings may be blunted, and that she may never know anything better; and therefore never have the anguish of leaving it. Then she will wish for nothing more than paper laurels or the applause of a crowd. There, at least, she will not know what a woman's dignity is; what an honest woman's customs are!"

"You are dreadfully bitter," he said, taking his arm away from her waist, and springing up. "What has come over you?"

"A mother's anguish," she said hoarsely; "a mother's anguish on the eve of leaving her child. Alfred!"— she called, and her voice sounded once more gentle and entreating—"come back to me, and listen to what I have thought over to myself during the long and sleepless nights in which Nora's future has flitted before me. Do

come!" He turned towards her again, and knelt at her side.

"Don't excite yourself too much," he said, laying his hand upon her burning forehead. "Do calm yourself down a little! We will talk of this another time."

"No; not another time! To-day, to-day! It would torment me too much if I were silent. Listen, Alfred, I have had such a beautiful dream!" And her arm wound itself round her husband's neck, and her look was such as the maiden bestows on her lover when she entices him to her side. "Such a beautiful dream!" she repeated. "You are rich now, you are famous also. You must not carry things too far. Give it up now that you have arrived at the climax; return with your fortune to my home. There, if you choose, you can enjoy a perfectly independent existence, and regain a social position more worthy of yourself. That is my dream, dear; what do you say to it?"

He looked at her in surprise; he was dumfoundered; he had evidently not expected this.

"You have thought more of your child's happiness than of your husband's," he said with a sombre expression.

"Oh no! of your happiness too," she said, smoothing down his thick black locks; "of your happiness too. So many things may occur to rob you of what you have gained. And I," she said, "I think I have a longing for home. Perhaps I might get well again there," she said hesitatingly, and turned her eyes away, that he might not read in them how little she believed in her own words.

She stopped short, and paused, as if expecting a sentence to be passed upon her.

He disengaged himself gently from her arms, and rose. Then he paced the room up and down, buried deep in his reflections. A perfect silence reigned, the ticking of the

clock and the man's steps alone seemed to remind one that life was moving on. At last he stopped suddenly before her.

"You have only thought of your child," he repeated in a hurt tone of voice. "Not of yourself; you have no longing for America; not of me——. Helen! I can't do it. What was once so difficult to me is now my pride, part of my life. I can no longer be a labouring peasant, I would be fit for nothing else; least of all for inactive repose. But don't worry," he added, seeing the deathlike paleness which had overspread her features. "Sacrifice for sacrifice; leave me my occupation, and you take your child. It will be painful to me, for I shall become a complete stranger to her. Educate her with every possible womanly reserve and restriction you choose, and if you can succeed with such a little madcap, educate her to be as you were. I shall appreciate it less in my daughter than in my wife, but I promise you never to bring her in contact with my people; I promise you never to meddle with her education, and to consider your wish as law. Are you satisfied now, little puss?" he said more tenderly, and leaning forward he kissed her forehead, as she lay there amongst her pillows.

She was silent; her eyelids were almost closed, her lips trembled, and her hands were clasped convulsively.

"Are you satisfied?" he repeated. "When she is grown up, her father's money, the money gained by his 'peculiar career,' will soon guide her safely into the haven of matrimony. You see how I have thought of everything," he added. "But now let me look once more into those blue eyes which have once more won the day."

Perhaps she did not think that she had won the day; perhaps she had hoped to obtain more from him than this half sacrifice; but the very sound of his voice had

mastered her from the first day she had heard it. How could she resist it now, poor woman?

He kissed those dear eyes, which had still a restless and anxious look about them, and whispered to her all those sweet nothings a woman loves so to hear, be it even for the hundredth time. She was not convinced by him; she saw much that was shallow, much that was impracticable in his plan; but she had gained something; and then she was weary and exhausted by the warmth of the discussion.

He perceived it and arranged her pillows comfortably for her, and covered her feet with a shawl. His time was up.

"I will take Nora to dinner with me," he said, "so that she may not disturb you. In the afternoon, you will have her quite to yourself."

She did not seem to notice his words. He arose and went to the nurse, telling her to be in readiness should her mistress require her. He then called the little girl and left the room on tip-toe.

Helen was alone. She was in a dreamy, almost unconscious state, such as we experience after some great pain of mind or body; but she was not asleep, and what she had gone through came back to her with fearful reality. As soon as the charm of Alfred's presence was gone, all her fears awoke and tormented her.

"Mother! mother!" she called out all at once, "take that word back! Don't say that I shall regret it! I have been so very happy! It is only for the child, you see."

And she pressed a little cross to her lips, as if to give herself comfort.

Helen Wild was the daughter of Irish people, who had emigrated while she was still a child, and had succeeded in making a considerable fortune.

The shy and well-brought-up young girl had required some of the warmth of her nation, and also some of its

recklessness, in order to lead her to unite her fortunes with those of the handsome adventurer, in spite of the opposition and displeasure of her parents.

It was only after a very long struggle that they had at last given their consent, and then it was under the condition that she would always be kept away from association with his company.

Her husband had fulfilled his promise, for this fair daughter of Erin, so thoroughly charming in all her ways, was the dearest treasure of his heart. He loved Helen with all the depths of tenderness which in him were so strangely mixed up with a restless spirit. His wife was to him the embodiment of his former position in life; in her he found all that he missed in his adventurous career.

Soon after their marriage, the Karstens returned to Europe. There Karsten gained an unprecedented reputation in his profession, and became the greatest circus-rider of his day.

He had fixed seasons, in which he visited with his troup the great capitals of Europe, and he was always greeted with the same enthusiasm. His distinguished air, his good breeding, and gentlemanlike manners gained for him an agreeable position amongst men, and he surrounded his wife with all the comfort and luxuries his now great fortune allowed.

Helen did not mind living away from society; her heart was satisfied in the love she bore her husband and her child; and her travels were sufficient amusement for her.

The first shadow that fell upon Helen's married life was her ill health, which began after the birth of a second child, who only lived a few days. Perhaps Alfred did not see the fearful progress her disease had made during the two or three last months, or perhaps he would not see it; and, man-like, hoped that, by not admitting it to himself,

the fact would not exist. Helen felt no illusion of the sort, and the conviction of the short time left her upon earth added to her anxiety about her child.

Neither the one nor the other was satisfied with their conversation, for both had consented to a sacrifice, and both felt that it was not a sufficient one.

CHAPTER II.

SHORTLY after leaving his wife, Director Karsten entered the dining-room of the hotel, leading his little girl by the hand. It was the height of the travelling season, and the spacious hall was filled with guests of the most varied descriptions; all eyes turned at once towards the fine-looking man with so lovely a child. Nora, at seven years old, was no ordinary looking little girl. Her graceful figure had already something of her father's proud attitude; she had also inherited from him the regularity of her features, the fine pencilling of her eyebrows, and the masses of her dark hair. Her inheritance from her mother was in her soft blue eye, and her remarkably fair complexion, contrasting so strangely with the rest, and accompanied, too, by her mother's sweet and ever-varying expression. She was dressed, according to English fashion, in white, and her neck and arms were bare; her striking and peculiarly foreign beauty was completed by the jet-black hair—wonderfully black for a child—which fell in thick masses down to the hem of her short dress.

The child moved about with perfect assurance and tranquillity amidst the crowd of strangers. Her father had caused a seat to be reserved for him near some gentlemen he had made acquaintance with. The gallantry and the

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open admiration with which she was greeted seemed to make no impression upon Nora; she accepted both with the indifference of old custom, and with the dignity of a small archduchess. The gentlemen's conversation soon turned upon "shop," for there was a constant interest afforded by the director's long experience in the art of horsemanship.

Notwithstanding Nora's passion for her father's favourite pursuit, she soon saw that such talk was above her comprehension. Feeling rather bored and put on the shelf, her look wandered round the room. All of a sudden her eye glistened; new guests had arrived, and the reason of her joy was that she had espied amongst them some small people of her own age. Children always have such a power of attraction to each other!

To Nora's no small pleasure the new arrivals came near the place where she sat. A distinguished looking lady led by the hand a little girl two or three years younger than Nora, and dressed in deep mourning. Two boys, of nine and of thirteen years old, followed in the rear, accompanied by a young man, whose long black coat and Roman collar sufficiently proved his profession, and who seemed to be their tutor. The lady and the little girl sat down opposite Nora, the tutor and the boys next to her, so that the eldest of the two became her neighbour.

Like a true boy, he did not vouchsafe so much as one look upon the little girl, and seemed wrapt up in his dinner. The lady, however, often looked at the beautiful child, whose expressive eyes clearly said how much she longed to shorten time by a little conversation with the new comers.

She soon became incapable of mastering her desire any longer, and, with that sort of freemasonry which exists between children, she addressed her neighbour with the usual childlike question of what was his name.

The boy looked up surprised. Then, however, the child's loveliness produced its effect even upon his thirteen years, and the conversation was soon set agoing.

The lady and the priest also took part in it, attracted as they were by the lively and unaffected manner of the child, who spoke now of her sick mamma, now of her many journeys, and seemed able to understand and to speak all the languages of the continent.

In the midst of this animated flow of conversation the director arose, and made his little girl a sign to follow him. Absorbed in his own talk he had hardly noticed the newcomers. Nora now took farewell of them with the calm self-possession and graceful amiability peculiar to her, and they, attracted by the handsome and refined appearance of Alfred Karsten, looked after the couple with interest and curiosity.

"Who is that gentleman with the charming child?" asked the lady of the waiter behind her chair; he had bowed to the director as only great names or heavy purses are bowed to.

"That's Director Karsten," whispered the waiter; "the well-known director," he explained, answering the questioning look of the lady.

"Director Karsten!" repeated the lady, astonished and disappointed.

"Yes, your honour; he has the most renowned company," the waiter reported further; "and the child is his daughter. They have been here a few days, and the lady, his wife, is ill. The representations will take place shortly."

"O mamma! The Circus Karsten!" exclaimed the boys. "We must see it; he is supposed to have such beautiful horses. Mamma, do let us go there at once."

The mother nodded her assent, but she did not seem satisfied with the news she had received. "How distin-

guished he looks," she said as if to herself, "but that poor and handsome child"——

"Who were your new acquaintances at the table d'hôte, you chatterbox?" asked the director also, as he went up the stairs with his little daughter.

"I don't know their names, papa. The big boy next to me they called Curt, and the little one Nikkel. Just fancy, what a funny name—Nikkel! The little girl they called Lily; but she is not their sister, for she called the tall lady her aunt; the boys called her mamma."

"How did the young priest call the lady?" asked the director.

"He called her countess, and they come from Austria; that I was able to make out. There they live in a beautiful and large property of theirs, and they are taking the little girl there, because she has lost her parents. They have also lost their papa," continued the loquacious little being.

"Well, we know something about them, at any rate," said the director smiling. "But now go to Hannah. Be good and quite quiet, because mamma is asleep. If you want to play, you can play here in the corridor, so as not to disturb her." He opened the door for the child to go in, and paused uncertain on the threshold. The conversation of the morning had left a conscience prick behind it; he was afraid of renewing it. "She is sure to be asleep," he observed, listening again in order to be quite certain; and then he turned to go.

In Helen's room there reigned the most profound silence. She had hardly eaten anything since the morning, and lay inanimate on her couch. The recent excitement seemed to have exhausted her, for not one word passed her lips, only the dry cough sounded now and then at short intervals.

The nurse, hoping that she was asleep, prevented the child from going in to her. The lively and high-spirited

little thing soon found the room too small, and, according to her father's permission, went out for a romp in the corridor. Nora also entertained the shadow of a hope that she would meet her new acquaintances. She was not deceived. As she looked dreamily over the high balustrade down into the courtyard, which was full of people, she saw the priest coming up the stairs with his pupils.

"So quiet and so lonely!" he said kindly, as he caught sight of the child.

"Papa is gone out, mamma is asleep, and Hannah is scolding," reported the child concisely.

"Those are three sad things for you, little one," said the chaplain smiling. "Don't you feel bored?"

"I thought you would come," said the child openly, "and that's why I remained here. I already heard your little girl crying in there," she added, pointing to one of the doors in the passage.

"Yes, Lily is there with our mother," said the elder boy. "Come in with us," he added, kneeling before her so as to bring his tall limbs down to her height, whilst she laid her hand confidently upon his shoulder. "Come with us," he repeated.

"I may not do that," she answered. "I may not go to strangers; mamma has forbidden it once for all. But I may play here," she added wistfully.

"Well, then, we will play here," said the boy. "You don't mind, do you, sir?" he said, turning to the chaplain.

The latter nodded assent; he also felt attracted towards the child.

"What shall we play at?" asked the boy again. "Can you skip?" he said, pointing to the skipping-rope she had brought out of her room with her, as the long passage seemed a favourable ground for the purpose.

"If I can skip!" she said contemptuously. "I can do a deal more than you think. Strike it for me!"

The boys complied with her wish. The small creature then raised herself on her toes, drew her body up to its full height, threw back her dark hair, and lifted her arms high above her head. Graceful like a fairy she danced on to the rapid curves of the rope with the most wonderful and nimble movements.

All of a sudden the loud applause of the boys made her stop. "I have learnt that from Miss Emily," she said; "but I ought not to have done it," she added, abashed and contrite; "mamma cannot bear my doing it before strangers."

"And why does your mother dislike it?" asked the chaplain interested.

"Mamma says that it is not nice to show one's self off. She does not like my riding either."

"Does not your mamma ride, then?" asked the chaplain again.

"Mamma ride!" she said, with a pretty little movement of pride, and throwing back her head on her shoulders. "Papa's people only do that; and they do it for money!"

"Can you ride already?" exclaimed the boys, full of wondering admiration.

"Of course I can! Ride and drive too!" she said, shrugging her shoulders. "I have four piebald ponies which belong entirely to me. You can see them, if you go to the circus. The little Wimbleton drives the post with them; I have allowed him to do it. I can do it myself much better, though!"

The boys' eyes opened wide. "You can already drive a four-in-hand!"

"I can drive six horses at a time," she said with assurance. "This year at St. Petersburg I drove

before the Emperor with six ponies, and quite alone. He would not believe papa when he told him that I could do it; so mamma allowed me to do it after a great many entreaties. I also remember quite well what the Emperor said," she added; and it was easy to perceive how much she longed to be asked what it was.

"What did he say?" exclaimed her listeners.

"First of all, he took me up in his arms, and kissed me, and gave me this," she said, showing a locket, in the shape of a heart mounted with pearls, which she wore round her neck. "But you must not laugh," she said to Curt, whose mouth was twitching suspiciously.

"What did the Emperor say?" asked Curt, bringing her back to the point.

"He said—he said"—she hesitated a little, "she will one day cause the world to talk about her much more than about you, and will put you in the shade, my dear Karsten," repeated the child, word for word, and with great precision.

"Now, you're laughing after all," she said indignantly, as even the chaplain could not refrain from a smile.

Curt, meanwhile, had blushed to the roots of his hair during her last speech. "I am not laughing a bit," he said seriously. "Your mamma is quite right; it is not at all nice for a little girl to let herself be seen thus. It would pain me very much to hear you talked of as a circus-rider. It would, indeed, be a very sad thing to happen to you."

The boy had spoken warmly. Damped by the sharpness of his reproof, the child looked up at him, and an expression of pain passed over her little face. He saw it and was sorry. Once more, kneeling beside her, he stroked her dark hair back from her forehead, and said in a friendly tone, "Now, don't be angry with me. You

won't be a circus-rider, will you?—But have you learnt other things also besides riding and driving?"

"Oh, a great deal!" answered the little one ingenuously. "Mamma gives me lessons every day, and then I have masters, too. I can already read and write in three languages, and I also know my catechism," she added, with a look at the chaplain, as if that were more particularly his business.

"Who teaches you in it?"

"Mamma does, and every day, too: I have already been to confession. You are also a priest," she added, "I noticed that at once."

"Really!" said the chaplain. "So you found that out at once, eh?"

"I know a great many priests, you see. When we arrive in a town, and remain sometime in it, mamma takes me at once to one, and he makes me go through an examination. Mamma is very pious, you know. She goes to church every day; but now she is ill," the child chattered on.

"That is very good of your mamma," said the chaplain, moved by the description of the mother who, amidst all the fatigues of a wandering life, had not neglected to guide her child's soul. "Mind you become as good as she is."

"Are you also pious?" asked Nora, looking up with her large eyes into Curt's face.

"That's what you get for preaching, Curt," smiled the chaplain. "But, come now, boys, your mother will be expecting you."

"No; do remain here a little longer," cried Nora, holding Curt back. "*You* remain, at all events. Let your brother go in."

She looked pleadingly at him. The boy did not dislike to be begged thus; he remained where he was, and

considered the little thing as some new and wonderful toy.

"What a funny little creature you are!" he said. "But there is mamma already," he added, rising hastily as his mother entered the corridor from one of the rooms opening upon it.

"What are you doing there?" she asked, approaching the group.

The chaplain was going to answer, when another door was thrown violently open, and a strange looking woman fell upon the countess, crying and screaming in one breath. The latter at first shrank away from her, taking her for some mad woman or other.

"Oh! help! help!" screamed out the woman in broken German, and wringing her hands the while. "Missus dies, and no one there to help her!"

"What does she want?" said the surprised countess.

The child, however, sprang towards the new comer, and encircling her with her arms, called out, "That is our Hannah. Hannah! what is the matter with you?"

"O Miss Nora! mamma so ill, and master not there!" moaned the woman.

"Mamma is ill," repeated the child, suddenly understanding what Hannah meant. "O mamma! mamma!" she then called out, bursting into tears, and hastening into her mother's room.

"There seems aid required here, sir," said the countess. "Try and find out from this person who the husband is, and where he is, whilst I see what can be done." And, without hesitating, she entered the sick woman's room, in which she already heard the voice of the weeping child.

Helen lay as before upon her couch, but her head had sunk back into the pillows, the sweet features were contracted, and a streak of blood, trickling down from her lips upon her dress, sufficiently showed what had taken place.

The child had thrown herself upon her mother, and was calling her by all the most loving epithets she could think of; but the young creature lay motionless, seemingly unconscious of all that was going on around her.

Curt, who had followed the child, tried in vain to soothe her.

The countess took in the whole situation at a glance.

"Try to get the child away for a moment, so that the mother may not be frightened, and send at once for a doctor," she whispered to her son, and began tending the sufferer. She carefully placed her head in a better position, and bathed the burning forehead and wetted the parched lips.

"Mother," breathed the poor woman, opening her eyes wide. But at the sight of an unknown face, an expression of surprise and of disappointment depicted itself on her features.

"Calm yourself," said the countess kindly, "I am a stranger to you, whom chance has brought to your side. Allow me to nurse you until your husband's return. I have already sent for him."

She was rewarded by a look of deep-felt gratitude, after which the tired eyelids closed once more. The countess watched the patient attentively, and she saw the shadows of death gradually gathering around her eyes, and changing the expression of the mouth. She also examined the different objects near the couch. Close to the travelling clock was a prayer-book, and the rosary which lay in the folds of the young creature's dress seemed to have slipped out of her fingers. The countess's decision was taken.

"Is there any one else you would like to speak to before your husband's arrival?" she said in a low but distinct voice.

The eyes opened slowly and with difficulty, but they

were full of intelligence and of acquiescence. The lips moved hastily, but not a sound was heard. The hand, however, made a sign on her forehead and breast, which the countess understood. She answered it by making the sign of the cross herself.

"My chaplain, the tutor of my sons, is here," she said again gently and distinctly; "would you like him to come, or shall I send for the parish priest?"

Helen's hands were joined in mute entreaty, and she stammered: "Oh! at once! at once! I have so much to say!"

The countess satisfied her at once. Curt succeeded in getting the child away; with her arms tightly wound about his neck, she allowed herself to be carried by him into the next room, where Hannah sat completely overpowered.

The chaplain then entered the sick woman's room. He was still very young; he had only received holy orders a short time before, and had at once entered Countess Degenthal's house, so that it was for the first time that he had to exercise his holy office at a death-bed. Helen looked at him for a moment, as if she were studying his face. His features wore the calm of an angelic purity, and the holiness of his estate gave him a dignity far beyond his years. She felt that she could place confidence, place the great care of her life within his hands, and make him the representative of her wishes to her husband. And by an admirable guidance of Providence, the few words of a chattering child had given him the key to her position, so that he could understand her at once, to her great relief. His advice accorded completely with her wishes, and she felt a sensation of repose come over her which she had not had for a long time, after she had given him full powers concerning her child.

Her peace with God was soon made; she had a simple

and childlike mind, unsullied by the world, and prepared long ago for this solemn hour.

Her husband entered as soon as she had completed her confession; he had received the news quite unexpectedly on arriving at the hotel, for the messenger had just missed him, and his passionate nature gave way completely before this dreadful anguish which had fallen upon him unawares. Helen's pale face was animated by a faint colour when he entered, and a ray of love shone forth from her eyes; but the peace she had just felt was disturbed. It is not easy to quit this earth when two loving arms hold us back, when earthly happiness asserts itself once more. Alfred was only conscious of his own presence; he did not even notice that strangers were there. Helen's heart, however, was filled by another love as holy as that she felt for her husband: knowing that she had but little time left, she called for her child.

The husband hardly heard what she had said, but the countess, herself a mother, understood her, and made Curt a sign to bring the little girl in. Nora was still in his arms and would not let go of him, poor little frightened and sorrowing thing; so he carried her to her mother's couch, and held her up in order that the dying woman might embrace her.

But was it jealousy, or was it to bring the child before its father's notice, which made Helen push the boy hastily away, and lay her husband's hand on Nora's head? Something in this action pained Curt, and he retreated a step, blushing.

With the quickness of observation peculiar to the dying, Helen noticed this, and held her hand out to the boy; she signed to him to come nearer to her, until he leant completely over her. His was a handsome and pleasing boy's face, and tears were falling from his large brown eyes—so deeply did he feel another's sorrow.

Helen looked at him searchingly, and then raised her weak hand and laid it upon his head as if to bless him; her lips formed the words, "Thank you!" but she was prevented from saying more by a violent attack of coughing. To the alarm of the standers-by her handkerchief was once more tinted with blood. The doctor entered at last and made use of his authority, although he admitted that nothing could be done. He ordered the child away, and the chaplain led the husband also out of the room. The countess, however, remained, and continued to nurse Helen with care, fulfilling to the last her self-imposed service of love.

That was a long and melancholy night during which the young life fought its battle with death. It was only at morning dawn that all was over.

Around the couch upon which Helen had breathed her last, knelt these various people so strangely brought together: the priest, who had administered the last consolations to her, and the despairing man he was endeavouring to comfort, offered two very different types, chosen from two very different stations in life; the boy knelt also, and tenderly held the little girl who had cried herself to sleep in his arms; and the countess stood and supported in a sisterly manner the head of the dead stranger, the wife of the horsebreaker, whose position had wrung a sigh from her, and caused her to shrug her shoulders with a proud pity.

Eight days passed by. Helen's body had been three days in its home under the earth. The widower had mastered the first emotion of his grief, and the exigencies of life began once more to claim their due. It is, indeed, fortunate when work does come and force us out of the contemplation of our grief. There is something levelling in great sorrows, as in any out-of-the-way events, which do away for the moment with every social barrier. The

countess had been indefatigably kind and active in the services she had rendered the afflicted family. Little Nora had remained completely under her protection, so that the child should not feel the loss of her mother too acutely.

But now everything was to return into the old and beaten road which is to be seen above each grave. Karsten intended to leave the town where he had suffered so much, for he had not the heart to give any representations in it. He, therefore, came to fetch his daughter and to take leave of the countess.

Now, that all necessity for her succour had ceased, the refined lady first noticed the difference of station which separated them, and it seemed strange to her to receive such a man as her equal.

Countess Degenthal belonged by birth and by education to one of the most exclusive sets in her country. "To be exclusive, to keep aloof from every other society than your own, to remain completely amongst your own people," is often thrown as an accusation against the nobility, but other societies also have the same exclusive spirit, each one in its own way. It is the essence of every different station in life, and only consists in the similarity of its elements. The same mode of living, the same interests and opinions inevitably raise barriers, which, when thrown down, build themselves up again, after one has thought them destroyed for ever. Within these barriers are born the advantages as well as the duties inherent to each position. Idealistic and senseless dreamers alone can have imagined anything so thoroughly unnatural as a state of complete equality—unnatural if only through the fact that it never existed, and never could exist in the long run.

In Christian countries, the differences of caste can never impose themselves in an overpowering way; for above all other rules is the gentle law of Christian love, which extends itself equally to all, as well as the severe law of

Christian justice, which gives every soul the same worth, and calls each one before the throne of the same judge.

The spirit of exclusiveness in social relations lies particularly in the dislike to introducing new manners into one's set. Nobility, as the most stable of all, has the right to shut itself up more entirely than any other set, but with a few exceptions it has not made its exclusiveness tend to the detriment of others. The nobleman fights in the same ranks as the simple soldier, competes for the same laurels as the sons of the people on the ground of science and art, learns his religion in the lowest as well as in the highest places. True, that the raising of any barrier leads to conflicts, and has ever done so; true, that the individual may feel himself ill-used now and then; but conflicts are to life what the waves are to the stream; they prevent its stagnation, and individuals are only the exceptions which prove the rule.

The countess was an aristocrat of inflexible principles, who only sought the society of her equals. But we have seen that she did not hesitate a moment to serve her neighbour, and to lend her help when it was required. Hers was a nature devoid of much warmth of feeling or of tenderness, but her character was a strong and powerful one. Everything in her life was governed by a highly-developed sense of duty, which is certainly very pleasing to God, but which does not always replace to our fellow-creatures the warmth of the heart.

It had been a duty of Christian charity to assist the stranger, and in the fulfilment of this duty the countess would not have shrunk from the meanest offices. But, now that her help was no longer needed, she did not much care that their paths should meet again. She was too much a woman of the world to express this in a disagreeable manner, but she contented herself with imperceptibly drawing back, and confining the conversation to

strictly necessary things. Alfred Karsten had belonged too long to the same set of people not to feel this at once. He knew how to keep his place, so much so that it became the countess's turn to be impressed by his quiet assurance and his simple and well-bred manners. His fine features had gained even more expression by the gravity and melancholy depicted upon them.

The child had remained near Curt, who, with a tender care far above his age, had watched over her, and comforted her during this sad period.

At first only a few commonplace remarks were passed, such as are made when one is afraid of touching upon a sad event which has just taken place.

"And your little one," asked the countess, after having graciously listened to Karsten's warm thanks for her kindness, and after he had declared his intention to travel, "is she to accompany you?"

His features were contracted by a painful emotion at the question. For a moment he pressed his hand before his eyes, as if he required to muster courage for an answer, and then said, in a stifled voice, "I lose all at once. The chaplain has made me acquainted with the last wishes of my poor wife with regard to our daughter; and they will, of course, be sacred to me. I already knew her opinion in the matter, and she may have been right; a life like mine is not fitted for the education of a little girl. Anyhow, her wish shall be carried out. The chaplain has been kind enough to furnish me with the necessary address, and the object of my first journey will be to establish my little girl in a convent."

"In a convent!" repeated the countess with some surprise.

The contrast strikes you as a remarkable one," he said, somewhat ironically. "For my part, I would have adopted another mode of education for my daughter; but, as I said

before, her mother's wish is law to me. She was also brought up in a convent, and cherished the remembrance of her years spent there. May Nora grow up to be as loving and as good as she was!" he added, and a look of deep pain once more shot across his face.

"You are making there a very praiseworthy sacrifice," said the countess kindly, "and will, at all events, have the consolation of knowing that your child is in good hands."

He bowed in silence, without continuing the topic any further. The chaplain now entered, and gave him a few letters of introduction which might be of use to him on his arrival at the convent. The two men shook hands warmly and silently; the hour of sorrow had brought them close to each other.

"Nora," said the director, "our time is up."

The child, however, standing with Curt in the bow-window, did not hear her father's call.

"Take this," the boy had just said, thrusting a tiny prayer-book into her hand, "take this as a remembrance of these days."

"Write your name inside," she begged; "I shall never forget it, because you have been so very good; but it will be nice all the same to read it in there—also the day and the date, please."

The boy took a pencil from his pocket and complied with her request.

"Oh! you're writing a great deal more," she said, looking over his shoulder.

The boy quickly placed his hand upon her mouth. "Don't talk so loud," he said impatiently. "Can you read it?—but in a whisper."

"Wenn Menschen aus einander geh'n,
Dann sagen sie: auf Wiederseh'n,"

read Nora. "How pretty!"

"There, you needn't show it to anybody," he added, full of boyish fear that so sentimental an expression of his feelings should be read by any one else. "And now, what are you going to give me as a parting gift?" he asked, raising her like a feather and placing her on the window sill.

The child put on a grave face and reflected a few moments. "Will you have this?" she said, and pulling one of her jet-black locks she held it out to him. "Papa also took a lock of mamma's hair as a remembrance," she added ingeniously.

The boy could not refrain from a laugh, and he blushed up to his temples. To his thirteen years the comparison seemed rather a strong one.

She noticed his hesitation, and said: "No, take this!" catching hold of the little pearl heart she always wore round her neck. "Take this!" and, with a strong pull at the ribbon upon which it hung, she held it out to him.

"Your beautiful heart from the Emperor of Russia!" he said deprecatingly; "I am sure you may not give that away."

"Of course, I may. You must have it; there is no one I love so much as you, except papa, perhaps," she said, throwing her arms round his neck.

"And you won't be a circus-rider?" whispered the boy again, as he attached the locket to the chain of his watch.

"Nora!" called her father once more. "Come, my child, we must be taking our leave."

Nora held the boy's hand tightly in her own, as she came up to the countess, and then looked silently up into her face during a few seconds. She did not feel attracted by the tall and gaunt figure, and by the sharp and regular features, and, therefore, only placed her hand silently into the lady's hand.

"Well! Have you nothing to say?" urged her father.

"*Auf Wiedersehen!*" said the child, for those words were still ringing in her ears.

They moved the countess strangely. Perhaps it was the thing in the world she cared the least for; but the words sounded touching from the child's lips. "Well, then, *Auf Wiedersehen!*" she said, raising the child in her arms. "And may I find you again both happy and good."

"And you, too," said the child quickly and firmly, and then tore herself away; and then, rushing to Curt, fell sobbing in his arms.

The director wanted also to thank Curt; but his voice failed him. Perhaps it pleased the boy, more than any words could have done, that Director Karsten should shake hands with him warmly, as if he were a man.

One more bow, and father and child were gone. Those people, so strangely brought together, and whom Providence had so mysteriously united during a few days, were again placed asunder.

"What a peculiar man! And what a curious state of things," said the countess to the chaplain, after a short pause. "What can have induced him to take up such a line of business? To judge from appearances he seems far above his station, and yet he is quite at his ease in it! Where does he intend to place the child?"

The chaplain named one of the first houses of education in Belgium.

"But, dear me, sir!" exclaimed the countess, "why did you recommend that place of all others? That is where the children of the best and most distinguished families are brought up. It is a dreadful idea for the poor child!"

"Mr. Karsten insisted upon this one being chosen. He inquired what was the best house of education from every point of view, and seemed anxious to place his daughter

in the first and most expensive establishment of the kind. He is probably very rich."

"That doesn't matter in the least," said the countess impatiently. "What a false position she will be in after that education! This wandering life, and then, to be brought up in a convent, in which she will breathe another atmosphere, and where ideas and exigencies far above her position will be awakened in her—and then to return to such a life, to such a set!"

"The mother's chief wish was that her soul should be saved and cared for, and she trembled for it, exposed as Nora was to all the outward impressions and circumstances unavoidably attendant upon a circus-rider's life. She hoped that a good education, and principles of fervent piety, would serve her later on, as a shield against the many dangers which would assail her; and that she would then be able to understand rightly whatever position she might be placed in."

"Illusions, my friend, illusions! She can only be made unhappy in that way. She will find nowhere ground upon which to take root."

"We must also place some confidence in God's own guidance in the matter," said the chaplain quietly. "His flowers can bloom upon every soil, and this was the only manner in which the poor woman could hope that her child would be saved."

"God's flowers can bloom upon every soil!" These words resounded sweetly and softly in the boy's heart; for he had stood there, still mourning silently for his little playfellow, and his mother's hard words had hurt him— he did not exactly know the reason why.

Since the night, during which he had held the child in his arms, during which also he had been blessed by her mother, Nora's fate had preoccupied him. He felt as if since that hour he had been made responsible for what

might happen to her. He was old enough to understand the difficulty of her position, and a strange fear laid itself on his heart and saddened it, when he thought of what her life might be. He had the idea that he must protect and save her from all danger, and numerous plans had already crossed his brain on the subject. For one moment, he had even thoughts of asking his mother to adopt her, to educate her with them. But he had not had the courage to express this wish, for he knew what his mother's sarcastic smile would say to so Quixotic a proposal. "God's flowers can bloom upon every soil!" These words came to him and comforted him for not being able to act as he should have wished. And, indeed, Nora seemed to him as a lovely little flower.

CHAPTER III.

TEN years have gone by. In the first court of one of the numerous houses of education in Brussels a legion of half grown-up girls were playing by a picturesque old well. It was an established custom for the school girls to draw water themselves from the well, during the recreation, and the moment was one of enjoyable liberty to them.

Murmuring, rippling water has ever set women's tongues loose, as is proved by the many old tales of the well side. Here, also, went on a buzzing and a whizzing, a tittering and a whispering, as if the Tower of Babel were once more in construction.

"Look here!" now called out one voice raised above the others. "Look at what I can do!" And the speaker placed the filled pitcher upon her head, and with her back straight, her movements firm and easy, she bore it along.

"Rebecca at the well! Rebecca at the well!" sounded from all sides. "Nora, you look like a picture cut out of the Bible."

The comparison was a fairly good one: the tall and graceful figure clothed in a soft, dark dress, and the white shawl placed as a turban beneath her pitcher, brought out

the somewhat sharp but finely-cut features; whilst the dark plaits, which fell gracefully on either side of her neck, completed a picture which might well remind one of the patriarch's chosen bride. The girl thus with assurance went down the steps of the old well, which served as an excellent background.

"Not one drop spilt over!" she cried triumphantly. "Now, who can do that after me?"

Of course, the great feat was attempted by many; and some shook their wetted heads, in fear of the sister who watched over them, and who was now at a little distance from the spot where they were playing. Her timely absence raised the courage of the most daring, and for a moment they drew their heads busily together.

"Lily!" they suddenly called out to one of the youngest girls, who was timidly approaching the well with her pitcher, and whose hesitation and shyness showed that she was a new-comer. "Lily, to-day the water has to be carried on the head, do you hear? You must also try to do it; there, that's the way!"

"I can't do it, indeed, I can't do it," said the child deprecatingly.

The others had already formed a group around her, and one of them raised the poor little thing's filled jar on her head. One terrified and awkward gesture, and it fell to the ground. The poor child stood there, dripping and crying, whilst the madcaps burst out into a loud roar of laughter.

"Let us give her a ducking," cried one pert child.

The proposal was greeted with general approbation, and a heavy shower fell upon her innocent head, accompanied by shouts and rejoicings.

At the same moment the girl, who had begun the game with the pitcher, turned against Lily's persecutors, and placed herself before her, as if to protect her.

"Aren't you ashamed, all you big ones, to frighten the poor little thing thus?" she cried indignantly. "Not a drop more, or else I shall know how to avenge her!"

"Oh, of course! Nora must always be ordering us about," muttered some angrily. "*En avant!* Lily is already wet, and a little more water will do her no harm."

Nora was, however, quicker than the others, and before the over merry ones had been able to begin the second attack she flung her pitcher wantonly at them, so that they drew back screaming and pushing.

"Young ladies, what manners are those?" sounded all at once in reproving tones from the Sister Superintendent, whose return the pupils had not noticed in the heat of the affray. "Is that a fit game for young ladies? I should like to know who started so wild and so unbecoming an amusement," she continued severely. "Lily, what *do* you look like! I shall complain of you all to the Reverend Mother."

With these words she threw a searching glance upon the now profoundly silent group. Most of the girls, with innocent expressions, tried to retire into the background. Nora alone remained courageously, pitcher in hand, without altering her position. "Ah! you are the culprit I perceive, Miss Nora," said the sister sharply. "I should have thought that your long sojourn at the convent might have borne better fruit than such unbecoming tricks; but you seem incorrigible. I saw you raise the pitcher on your head some time ago, and you were, therefore, the cause of the whole thing. I shall not fail to tell the Reverend Mother of this, as her indulgence has made you so audacious. You will spend the recreation time in your room to-day, so that you may thus have an opportunity for reflecting upon your conduct. And you, Lily, go and change your dress. I trust that the other young ladies

will take example by this, and that nothing of the kind will happen again."

The sister spoke shortly and sharply, venting all her anger upon Nora; she was one of those petty natures who invariably lay the blame upon one, making that one responsible for all. The independence of Nora's character, as well as the preference shown her by the Mother Superior, had always been a thorn in this sister's side; and a little party spirit is ever found in every institution. Nora listened to the reproof with indifference; nor did a word of excuse pass her lips. She only gave one sweeping look of contempt at the group around her, as none came forward to defend her; then, turning her head proudly back, she refilled her pitcher, and walked slowly towards the house.

The others soon followed. "We oughtn't to have let the fault fall upon Nora," whispered a few of the most conscientious.

"She was the least to blame, and is always so kind to us all," said another. "Why didn't Lily speak up?"

"*That* girl speak up!" said a third one contemptuously.

"Pooh! I'm sure it doesn't matter," said the saucy one. "Madame is certain not to punish her; she always takes her part. That is all on account of her mysterious origin; we none of us know whence she comes, though her talent for acting may let us infer a good deal."

"I think it exceedingly odd that the Mother Superior should presume to bring us together with anybody whose parents' name one doesn't even know," said a long girl, with a sour expression.

"To my mind, it's often worse when one does know such details," answered another. These few words put the laughter on her side, for every one knew that the young lady, who was so anxious about Nora's origin, had anything but a well-sounding name herself.

"For my part," continued the first speaker quietly, "it strikes me as indifferent whether we know much about Nora or not. We all know that she is one of the cleverest and best in the whole school; even now, it is only through her silence that we have escaped punishment. She is the dearest friend I have here, whether she be of higher or of lower birth than I, as the case may be." The speaker was the daughter of a princely German house; the pride of position is a pride essentially vulgar.

Nora had plenty of time for reflection during that afternoon. Whilst the others were romping in the garden, she sat in her room and gazed upon the line of high mountains rising up against the horizon.

A profound earnestness had settled down upon her features, which had been so laughing in the morning, and her lips trembled like those of a child on the point of crying. It was not the solitude to which she had been condemned which made her so grave; she loved solitude, as every young creature does who has much to puzzle out for herself, and has, as it were, many questions to ask of life.

Perhaps the distant mountains produced the effect upon her. Perhaps it was her young blood which flowed too quickly in her young veins; perhaps it was that she felt restless at being pent up in those narrow walls, and that her thoughts wandered far away from them with too ardent a longing. A hand was now placed timidly on her shoulder, and a fair head was pressed against her own.

"Are you sad, Nora?" asked a hesitating voice. "It was naughty of me to let you be punished, after you had been so kind to me, and had taken my part."

"Ah! it is you, Lily, is it?" said Nora, awaking from her day dreams. "Never mind, little one, this isn't so

very hard a punishment after all. But why *did* not you put in a word, you little coward?"

"I hardly ever can say anything well," she answered in a shy and childlike tone. "I am always so frightened. But I am sorry now for your sake; for you are so good always, and particularly so to me;" and she threw her arms round Nora's neck.

Nora kissed her, and said soothingly, "Well, well, you'll know how to talk another time." But then suddenly looking into her eyes, she added: "Lily, you have gone and cried again. Child! who would be so doleful after three months' stay here?"

"I can't help it; I don't like being here; and I am home-sick," answered the child apologetically. "But you looked just as sad when I came in, Nora. I am sure you're also home-sick, only that you won't admit it."

"Home-sick!" said Nora; "no, indeed. It's just the contrary with me. I have a roaming sickness, if I may say so. I have been here for ten years, and it has become home to me—but I should like to get out into the wide world: here I feel the ground burning under my feet. Oh! what wouldn't I give to see other people, other views, other sights! To ride a horse again, to be leaping through the air!" and she stretched out her arms as with a great longing.

"Why don't you go home? You are quite grown up," said Lily, with the due respect of fifteen for seventeen.

Nora blushed slightly. "I have no real home," she said with embarrassment. "My mother is dead, and my father is always travelling about."

"Who is your father?" asked Lily with some curiosity.

Nora blushed more deeply; she never spoke about that. Since those days in Switzerland an indefinable feeling kept her from talking about him, and the silence of her teachers confirmed her in her reserve. Now, also, she left

the question unanswered, and the entrance of a third person was greeted by her as a welcome interruption. She turned towards the new arrival.

"Come, Elizabeth, come," she said; "we are both melancholy. Lily is home-sick."

"And Nora is roaming-sick," completed Lily.

"Roaming-sick!" repeated the girl who had taken Nora's part beforehand. "That is a complaint I know nothing of. I am too fond of the peace and quiet within these walls, where there is only one great object, one great aim, ever to wish to leave them."

"I know what you mean," said Nora, looking at Elizabeth; "but I am not like you. My thoughts wander through the whole earth, and yours only tend upwards."

"Very prettily said, as usual," answered the other jokingly. "But who knows what the future may bring, whatever our wishes may be?"

"The future! Yes, I should like to know what it will bring me," cried Nora. "Everything seems so problematical in my life, that I have not a notion what sort of mould it will be thrown into."

"I know very well what mine will be," chimed in Lily's quiet tones.

"You, little one?" asked the others.

"Yes, I! Why not? Aunt Georgiana has already settled it all for me. I remain here one year longer, then I return to my aunt, after which I marry my cousin, rather a distant one, but whom I have got into the way of treating as a very near one," she said naively.

The two girls laughed outright.

"So you'll marry your cousin! Are you quite certain of that already?"

"There is nothing to laugh at," answered Lily sensitively. "Papa wished it when he died, and my aunt wishes it too, and everybody knows about it."

"Who is the lucky cousin?" Nora was just going to ask, when a loud ring at the bell was heard.

"That's the bell to summon you before the Reverend Mother," said Elizabeth. "And at such an unusual hour, too! Sister Barbara seems to have been inexorable; we ought really to go in and defend you."

"Shall I go with you," asked Lily, clinging to Nora, "and tell the Reverend Mother who the real culprit was?"

"No, you poor little faintheart! I won't exact so much from you. I can fight my own battles, you know," said Nora; and her face became animated with a look of energy and courage. "I should like to fight it out with life, and see how I could turn it. A storm is better than an eternal repose, and Sister Barbara has done me rather a service than not in getting up a little storm for me."

"Take care, all the same. It might be worse than you imagine," said Elizabeth, in a warning voice, and with all the importance attached to such matters at school, where the ribbon, given as a reward, is as much longed for as stars and orders are longed for in the world.

Nora strode away, however, as gaily as a bird, and ran down the stairs, taking two steps at a time. At the door, however, she paused a moment, to compose her outward man, as an anxious recruit might do, lest anything disorderly in her appearance should add to the storm she was going to meet so bravely.

But she need not have been afraid of the Reverend Mother's piercing look to-day; the kind lady seemed quite lost in thought. She was not standing, as was always the case when some painful sentence had to be passed; she was sitting at her writing-table, and a letter was in her hands, from which she looked up to greet the new-comer with an almost sad expression. Madame Sibylle was a person short of stature and delicate looking; but from her eyes shone forth the strength of will and the energy of

action, which fitted her to be at the head of so large an establishment. As soon as Nora approached, she rose, and taking both her hands into her own, she drew the girl close to her.

"My child," she said, "there are certain turning-points in this life which must be got over."

Upon Nora, who was expecting something very different, these words, spoken with so much affection, fell as a heavy blow.

"My father! oh, my father!" she stammered, and an unutterable anguish seized hold of her.

"No, no; calm yourself," said the nun hastily, "he is quite well. Indeed, he is more than that; he is very happy, my child; he writes to tell me so, and to ask me to prepare you for an event which will shortly take place."

More and more surprised, Nora looked up. "Is he going to give up his business?" and a ray of joy shot from her eyes.

The nun shook her head. "My child," she continued, and she seemed to find her words with some difficulty; "it is a long time ago, now, since our Lord deprived him of his wife, of your mother. With God's help, you found a home here, and would that we had been able to make up to you for a mother's love."

Nora pressed her lips with emotion upon the nun's hands. Madame Sybille had been the first person who had taken the motherless child to her heart. It was on her knees that Nora had sobbed out all her anguish at parting from her father, and a great intimacy had grown up between the lonely child and the nun, who had been as much of a mother to her as her life in a religious institution permitted.

"Meanwhile, your father has been lonely, very lonely, all these many years, during which he separated himself

from you, for the sake of your education. He now wishes to form a family circle for himself, as well as a home for you. He is going to marry again, my child."

Nora's eyes had opened gradually more and more whilst the Reverend Mother spoke, and now she stared at her as if she could not understand what she meant.

"He is going to marry again," repeated the nun. And, then, perhaps, thinking it better to tell everything at once, she added; "He has just announced to me his engagement with Miss Emily Lauer."

It was difficult to realise whether Nora had understood the sense of the words spoken, so fixedly did she stare into the blank space before her. Suddenly, however, she pressed both her hands upon her face, and a low cry of pain rang from her lips.

"Sit down, my child," said the Mother Superior, kindly pushing a chair towards her, and embracing her tenderly. Nora let her head drop heavily upon her old friend's shoulder; this blow had, indeed, fallen upon her unexpectedly.

Although Nora had not lived with her father of late years, their intercourse had been intimate and full of affection. He had visited her often at the convent, and the chivalrous looking man, who used to load his little girl with presents and "good things" each time he came, had been the subject of great interest amongst the school girls; both their curiosity and their admiration had been awakened by him, so that Nora was very proud of him. He also kept up an active correspondence with her; and in his converse with his daughter, as formerly with his wife, had given expression to the best and most serious traits in his character. He had always traced her mother's portrait to her, idealised even by memory, as that of a holy woman; the expression of his love as well as of his sorrow had continually found its way into his letters; in

which also, at every moment, unmistakable signs of good-breeding and of learning evinced themselves. So it was that Nora, meditating over all this, came to the conclusion that some great misfortune had caused her father to adopt his career, and that, at the bottom of his heart, he must be miserable. It had been her childhood's dream to make up to him for everything by her love, and to reconcile him thus with life. She was proud and jealous of being the only one so near his heart, the only one who had a right to his affection. And now this place, which had seemed to belong to her, was to be occupied by a stranger, and another woman would desecrate her mother's memory.

Youth is generally horror-struck at love being transferred from one person to another, from an old memory to a new reality; it seems incomprehensible, unnatural, revolting. Moreover, youth is severe in the realm of feeling, and the ideal Nora had built up in her heart suddenly fell down before her eyes; she ignored how many sensations can besiege one's heart in later years.

The nun saw the bitter line settling around her mouth, and noticed the gesture with which she thrust the letter away from her.

"Child," she said, tenderly smoothing Nora's dark hair, "do not be severe, and condemn that of which you cannot fairly judge; you have no idea of the solitude of advancing years."

"But he had me now; I would have hastened to him, oh, so joyfully!" exclaimed Nora impetuously. "No, no; I tell you it is dreadful of him to do such a thing!"

"And would you have remained always with him?" asked the nun with a faint smile, and looking straight into her eyes. "Children's roads often lie apart from those of their parents."

A deep blush overspread Nora's brow at this question,

and a strange feeling passed through her heart at the thought it suggested. Yes, how had she pictured the future to herself in her day-dreams? She hung her head ashamed.

"No being has the right to shape out another's happiness according to his or her own view of it. It is the worst kind of selfishness which can exist," continued the nun seriously. "Accept this event in a resigned spirit, and remember that Providence has willed it thus for you. Your father also hopes to give you a pleasant home. After he has been married a few months, you will return to him, and will leave us therefore very soon, my child. You have no idea how painful it will be for me to part from you, dear."

But Nora did not notice the sorrowful tone in which these last words were spoken; her thoughts were still quite engrossed by this appalling piece of news.

"And is the—the—lady," she asked in suppressed tones, "one of the riding company?"

"It is hardly probable," said Madame Sybille soothingly, "that he should choose a wife from any other set now. He does not mention it, but his silence leads me to conclude that it is the case. But he distinctly says that her good and amiable qualities will certainly contribute to your happiness."

"Oh!" exclaimed Nora once more, as if in bitter anguish. "*That* too!" Then suddenly springing up and throwing herself into the arms of the Mother Superior, she cried out: "Oh, don't make me go to her! Keep me, do keep me here!" and a torrent of tears fell from her eyes.

The nun supported the weeping, trembling form of the poor girl, and pressed her to her heart, as if she would indeed have liked to keep her there. Were these words the experience of Nora's inmost thoughts, and was it her heart's secret longing which had asserted itself all at once?

Madame Sybille was grave and experienced, and her

soul had ripened in the vineyard of the Lord. She had welcomed hundreds of children to her convent, and had parted from hundreds in tears; but however warm and affectionate was the interest she took in them all for duty's sake, her individual feelings for each of them had been blunted by habit. Still there are natures gifted with singular charm, and offering us such riches of heart and mind, as beautiful countries offer, which give us an idea of heaven. And Nora possessed one of these natures; she was so warm, so generous, so endowed with head and heart, that those who, having once known her, could no longer enjoy intercourse with her, felt themselves miserably bereaved.

Madame Sybille, the experienced Mother Superior, had taken this child to her heart; and because her position was a sad one, she had determined to protect her more than any of her happier pupils. With a fine understanding, she had tried to make the difference less painful for her whose early life, spent under the shelter of a convent, was destined to pass her riper years among the dangerous associations of her father's set. She had been rewarded by the child's fond affection, as well as by her confidence. Nora's future had often pre-occupied the nun, who foresaw she was not likely to go through the world unnoticed, finding a quiet place in it from which nothing would force her.

And in what a world, in what an atmosphere, in what a mode of life she would now enter! Nora was in the most unnatural of positions, taking root upon no soil, without protection or support wherever she turned. Could one blame the nun if the thought had crossed her mind, how she would like to conceal her darling, and keep her from all danger, in the House of God?

She had never uttered a syllable in that sense, only in her prayers had she breathed the wish to Heaven; but

now, at Nora's passionate appeal, she drew her closer to her heart.

"Well, then, my child, remain here," she said gravely. "Can you make up your mind to walk with us along the narrow but quiet path to God, and for God? He fills the heart with such a beautiful peace! and for you, my child, it would be a port in many a storm. I would bless the hour in which you took such a determination."

She spoke fervently and persuasively. Nora's face lay upon her shoulder, so that she could not observe her expression. For a long time did the girl remain silent; at last she raised her head.

"No," she said gently, but firmly. "No, I cannot do it; I think it was only pride which gave me the first idea of it. I do not as yet long for peace and quiet. I cannot remain in the port just now; rather let me go out to meet storms and danger. I have been, oh, so happy here! But do not tell me to remain; let me go, let me go! I cannot be as Mary at the feet of the Lord."

A deep expression of disappointment passed over the nun's face, and yet she could not help laughing at Nora's strange way of expressing herself. "Well, then, go, my child," she said, "go. Each heart has its own road traced out for it, and each one leads to the goal. May the struggling not be too hard for you! But struggles and dangers do no harm either. I shall have to learn to do without you; your old friend will miss you, dear. However, it is one more sacrifice which the Lord wishes. But we shall remain united by our thoughts, and through our hearts, wherever you may go."

"Oh! how will it all turn out? It is dreadful to think of!" said Nora, shuddering.

"'Do, my child, as Thomas à Kempis says, when he alludes to the angry sunshine of life in the restless change of the world. Only never forget one thing: the child is not

more than the parent. Such is God's will, and human law accept it with humility, for no soul has yet been lost when practising holy obedience. Our parting is, however, not quite so immediate. Only in three months' time will your father come and fetch you. Now go, dear. The evening bell is ringing for prayers, and you will be best able to compose yourself in God's presence. I dispense you from the supper in common; for I know that it is better to be alone after some great event has taken place. Go, and answer your father's letter in the affectionate spirit he has always shown you."

And Nora went. She then read her father's letter, and was touched by the fondness he expressed in it for her; so touched that she resolved to think without selfishness of his new happiness, and tried to picture to herself the change she had so longed for in the brightest of colours. But when she was in bed she lay awake long, and as she gazed upon the surrounding objects, amongst which she had lived so many years, they seemed to acquire a new charm for her.

From the black cross which hung upon the wall, to the white dimity curtains which surrounded her little bed, everything was grave, pure, and retired, as a girl's early years should be before she steps out into the brilliant sun, and confronts the world's restless and animated atmosphere. Quiet and simplicity is to the maiden as the wood's shadow and seclusion is to the violet: it causes it to retain its bloom, its freshness, and its perfume. And now the contrast laid itself forcibly upon Nora's heart; how simple and sweet everything was here; how restless and uncertain the world would be! Once more did the light shine forth to her from that haven of rest she had longed to desert, and her heart seemed ready to break with the prophetic pain of parting. Nora burst into tears, and burying her head in the pillow, she sobbed out loud.

The sound of a light footstep was heard approaching her bed, and an arm was placed caressingly round her neck. It was Elizabeth, who, with some other girls, shared her room.

"Was it then so very hard?" she asked in a whisper.

"What?" answered Nora, who had forgotten everything else. "Oh no!" she continued, remembering all of a sudden; "that wasn't it a bit. Elizabeth, I am going away very soon, going to my father."

"Well, then! Your longing to go away will be satisfied," she said, smiling. "Why do you cry so?"

"O Elizabeth! Pray that my home-sickness may not turn to disappointment; perhaps I longed for home too ardently."

"Why dread home-sickness, if it be after the real home?" said Elizabeth gravely.

CHAPTER IV.

IT was April. Grey clouds chased one another across the sky. The whirlwind was blowing snow-flakes about; but there, where the grey clouds were parted, a pure bit of blue burst forth, together with a bright sunshine; the snow-flakes began melting into water drops, which sparkled like jewels as they hung upon the brown and green buds of the trees, and the earth seemed warm, and impregnated with spring's perfume. Oh! the joyous month of April! It peeps out and flirts with you, until you come out of your winter prison; it warms the plants, so that they also come out of their protecting shells; and then, once they are there, how wildly do they get blown about! Yet who can resist the month of April, although it has taken us in so often?

It was also the case to-day on the Promenade of the Rhenish university town. Every one was out, and walking up and down under the still leafless trees, as if they must, one and all, take a breath of the soft spring air, and enjoy a ray of the bright sunshine which shone down upon them, and which seemed already undisputed master of the position. And yet, round about, the little globules of water glittered, as tell-tale witnesses of the storm which had just blown over, and high above once more

appeared a handbreadth of grey, as a sign of what was coming.

Amongst the fluctuating wave of walkers, the pert, gay-coloured student's cap was predominant. Indeed, it asserted its superiority so much, that one saw how fully it felt itself at home, and from beneath it shone forth the youthful and careless faces, with the ever-varying and high-spirited expression of the German student. Yes, German April and German student—where else are you to be found in your own speciality? Where else does one find on the Continent this combination of two seasons, this intermediate pause between two ages of man's life? It has retained the storms of March, and has anticipated the sun of May; it is sharp as the winter, gleeful as the spring; progressing but slowly in its outward development, inwardly fermenting and purifying itself; changeable and mad, soft and dreamy—such is the German April and the German student-time. More to the south or to the north, to the east or to the west, the character of the one or the other season is more distinctly brought out. Here alone does man, as well as nature, know the intermediate time, in which the unripeness of one period confounds itself with that burning love of life, in which the boy's games encroach upon the gravity of manhood, so that something strange and wonderful grows out of it, such as one can hardly explain to one's self later on.

And golden wine, rich fruit, and gigantic trees, the land of April showers, matures them all; and profound thinkers, powerful combatants—men, in short, in the full meaning of the word, grow out of the mad German student air. And with a strange analogy the student has founded his kingdom there, where the month of April has the most showers, and the most buds. On the Rhine, on the Necker, on the Leine, on the Saal, in Central Germany's temperate

climate, does the university life bloom, and there it is the best understood.

The young people on the aforenamed promenade displayed that ingenuous self-consciousness and that narrow clanship, if we may so call it, which distinguishes the sons of the muses. One saw them mostly gathered in various groups and completely engrossed by their own affairs—affairs which are as enigmatical to the outsider as their own peculiar and mystical language. To them, however, it is a whole realm of laws and customs which they seem to consider of the utmost importance.

One of the groups now broke up with shakes of the hand and nods. The words, "Hotel X, at 4 o'clock," and "Bowl," enabled one to guess the young men's disposal of the afternoon. Two of them entered a side avenue. They offered a decided contrast. The one was remarkable for his corpulence, a strange anomaly with his youthful face, so round and rosy and fair, which itself was the personification of German comfort, while from its broad circumference shone two twinkling little grey eyes, which would have passed unnoticed, had not their expression been so sharp and so witty—an expression which never missed its aim when supported as now by a tightly-closed mouth.

His companion seemed, by his side, even taller than he really was; his figure was in perfectly good proportion, and the elasticity in his walk made up for the expression of firmness which was missing in him. His face was as changeable as the other one's was calm; and if the other's eyes were almost unnoticeable, in him they were the principal feature. One might have said of him, that he had a face "all eyes;" and they were grave eyes, deep and beaming, as brown eyes can be. As yet they had no decided expression, but they revealed a world of thought and of feeling. The broad forehead was intelligent, and both white and smooth, and testified to a singular degree

of purity and of openness. The most indifferent part of the face was the mouth and chin. A soft moustache partly covered the lips, the lines of which displayed more good nature than firmness, but were also totally free from sensuality. Surrounded by thick brown hair, the youth's face was very attractive, elevated above reality, as one loves to see it in youth, and yet looking out joyously into the world, almost laughing from the bliss of living.

His words were in unison with this feeling. "I do declare one can only live here," he said, whirling his cane through the air. "There is such driving and thriving. Nature and people—life, in short—has such charms that one hardly has time for breathing, and yet one feels one's self growing better in this gold-winged liberty."

"You Southern Germans are only school-boys at your universities," said the fat one, with the sovereign contempt of the thorough North German for every other condition than the one he lives under. "However, there are some who also go to the bad here, in this gold-winged liberty—vulgar beer or golden juice of the vine. You'll have to gather up your strength for to-night; at the last meeting there was a certain sly fox who went off rather early."

"Every beginning is difficult, but constancy wins the day," laughed the other one. "Moreover, these eternal libations are not much to my taste. Some of the drinkers hardly remain sober."

"It's perhaps better than not to have been a little intoxicated in this valley of tears," answered the fat one. "If wine did not go to some of their heads, they would have precious little in them. What are your projects for Whitsuntide in order to rest a little from your studies?"

"I have not made up my mind as yet," answered the tall youth, hesitatingly. "But listen, Dahnow, come home with me; have a look at the place in which your father and mine began their friendship."

"Many thanks, old fellow; but, to tell the truth, I had rather come in autumn to get a little shooting. Does your mother intend to shut you up at home again?" he asked, with a scrutinising gaze.

"She would anyhow have great pleasure in my staying with her."

"Proposal against proposal, Degenthal. Let us begin a tour in the Neckerland. I have already talked about it with some friends."

"That's not a bad idea; I will write home about it."

"The d—l! Now do make up your own mind for once in your life," cried the other impatiently. "One really would think that you were tied to your mamma's apron-strings."

An expression of displeasure flitted across Degenthal's face, and he drew himself up. "You may think what you like about it," he said, "but I am not fond of the tone of disregard for the feelings of a parent which is adopted by so many here. There is something of boyish roughness and rudeness in it, which I thoroughly dislike."

"I dislike it also," said the fat one, "although I have no longer the happiness of having a home. But a child is a child, and a man is a man, and one extreme generally leads in the end to another. If you now ask your mother about every trivial thing, who knows whether you will take her advice in important matters? For, believe me, no man can ever remain all his life dependent."

There was something so true in this last remark, that Degenthal could not answer it at once. His subordination to another person's will was partly a matter of habit with him, partly, also, he considered it his filial duty. "My mother has directed my education almost entirely," he said, after a few minutes' pause, "and I shall never wilfully do anything against her wishes."

"*Never!* Don't be angry, old fellow. But that is non-

sense. A man should never make a 'pronunciamento' he can't act up to. Your mother is a reasonable woman, who will know how to respect your will, as she values her own authority. Accustom her and yourself to an independence, which must exist some day. It is good for you, and cannot hurt her feelings in that case."

Degenthal was silent, and struck off the flowers from their stems with his cane as he walked thoughtfully along. It was strange to hear himself blamed for that which he had as yet considered a virtue. His mother, like many other mothers who have the sole direction of their sons' education, had exercised an absolute dominion over him, by awaking and developing his feeling of filial duty. He now began to understand the reason why his tutor had so much insisted upon his being removed for a time from the maternal roof, but he felt inwardly put out at having been made to discover that something was wanting in him. The two walked on in silence. Dahnow was not the man to re-open the conversation. Suddenly, however, both halted and stepped aside. Owing to the sand on which they were walking, they had not heard the approaching sound of horses' hoofs, so that a pair of riders were already quite close to them; these rode slowly past them, and then started off in a gallop.

"My stars, what horses!" exclaimed the fat one, electrified. "I have not seen such beautiful animals for a long time. Who can they be?"

"And what an amazon!" said the other. "She is perfectly charming! I wonder who she is."

"If she wants one to look at her, she ought not to ride such a grey. Magnificent creature that!"

"That's an affair of taste; I forgot the grey for the lady. Dahnow, you know every one about here: do tell me who she is? The gentleman's face is not new to me; the lady is dark.

"'Pon my soul, youngster, you have seen enough! They are certainly not from here; there are no such horses miles around. They are probably foreigners; the place is always full of foreigners. Anyhow, my friend, if you want to look at your beauty any longer, I shall wish you good morning and pleasant sport. Just look up at the sky."

"That certainly looks like a heavy shower," answered the other, glancing at the grey clouds hanging low above their heads. "I propose our going on at a quicker pace, so that we may get sooner under cover."

"You may have your race alone," said the fat one quietly; "it is not one of my favourite amusements; one gets out of breath, and wet all the same; I have enough of one evil."

"Then allow me to leave you to your fate. My breath can run a race with the storm. *Au revoir* at four o'clock, unless you get washed away in the shower. Fortunately you're safe not to be blown away," he added with a laugh.

The fat one phlegmatically buttoned up his coat across his breast, as the wind was rising cold and bitter. Snow-flakes and hail-stones soon began flying about, and the wind pursued them in wild chase. But he continued walking quietly along, undisturbed by the weather.

He had nearly reached the town when he was joined by the riding-pair on their way back. The lady's hat was suddenly caught by the wind, and began rolling rapidly across the road. Dahnow, as a connoisseur, noticed how well the rider stopped her horse in full gallop.

With more activity than we would have given the stout student credit for, he ran after the hat, and happily securing it, prevented its coming to grief in a ditch. He returned triumphantly with his booty, and delivered it to the owner. A small, gloved-hand took it, a blushing face,

around which fell the dark damp hair in a state of great confusion, bowed gratefully, and a pair of blue eyes shone from beneath their dark eyelashes with such sweetness, that they went straight through his thick coat to his heart. The words of thanks were carried away by the storm, and as soon as her hat was fixed on again, the young lady sprang after the gentleman into the town, and had long disappeared when the student had reached it.

"Hang it! The youth is right! That was really a beautiful girl. If I were not in such a pickle, after this odious shower, I would go to the hotel and inquire about her," muttered the fat one to himself. "Anyhow, I must have produced a nice effect upon her," he added, dolefully considering his dripping attire.

"Well, not drowned yet?" said Count Degenthal's cheerful voice, as, a few hours later, he met his friend Dahnow at the entrance of the X Hotel.

"No, as you perceive. Indeed, I have had the good fortune of an adventure."

"Of course, fat people are always so lucky."

"You thin ones race them out of the luck again. Now, guess whom I saw? Quite the right beginning, too, for becoming acquainted; rendered a knight's service to the dame concerned."

"The beautiful amazon! Did she fall from her horse? did you save her?"

"I regret to say that her hat alone had a fall."

"You *regret* to say, you abominable creature! Well, then, who is she?"

"That was not written in the hat."

"Then your acquaintance has not made great progress. But let us go in, the others are already waiting."

The youths had given each other rendezvous at a late dinner, in order to honour a guest, who wished to taste

the joys of a student's life for a few days. Theirs was a merry corner at the table; and the laughing and talking was mingled with the popping of champagne corks. Dahnow recounted his morning adventure with the humour peculiar to him; that humour of which the Frenchman says, that it makes others laugh, but never laughs itself. Great merriment followed upon his recital, and numerous questions and suppositions were made as to the name of the beautiful rider.

All at once, Degenthal nudged his friend—"Look there! there he is," he whispered, showing him a gentleman who had taken a seat at another corner of the table. "I think I know him," added Degenthal reflectively. "I am sure I must have seen those features somewhere.

"There sits our hero, but without the heroine," said Dahnow, addressing the others. "Probably a tyrannical father or a jealous husband, who wishes to conceal the beauty from the world's unhallowed eyes."

The young men all directed their looks towards him.

"I should think so, indeed," laughed the stranger; "he does not show his ladies for nothing. That is Karsten, the famous circus director. I know him very well; I saw him a few weeks ago at Vienna, where he gave some representations."

"Hurrah! Karsten! Then we shall also get a sight of your beauty, Dahnow," exclaimed the others.

"He has a young wife," continued the stranger, "and I have heard that she is very pretty; probably she was your heroine."

"No! It was Nora, little Nora!" exclaimed Degenthal. "How is it possible that I should not have recognised her at once! I must see her again!"

"Nora! little Nora!" said Dahnow, surprised. "You seem to have made wonderful progress in your acquaintance!"

"Nora Karsten!" said Degenthal again, without noticing the other. "That is the reason why the features struck me at once. How beautiful she has grown!"

"Our friend seems to be on the point of falling in love. Listen, Degenthal, a toast to your newly-recovered princess! She won't be so very prim as not to let us make her acquaintance."

The young men's light tone displeased Degenthal. "Gentlemen," he said seriously, "my mother, through a strange coincidence, once made the acquaintance of the Karsten family. Miss Nora Karsten was still a child, and as children we struck up a friendship. She spent some time with my mother; that is all."

The students looked at each other in wonderment. One of them, who had taken a drop too much wine, raised his glass and cried: "To our good Degenthal's charming childhood's friend!"

An angry light shot through Degenthal's eye. He seemed to be on the point of answering vehemently, when Dahnow touched him, and remarked that Karsten was on the point of going.

Degenthal arose and went up to him. "Director Karsten," he said, his voice still trembling with emotion, "will you allow me to renew our acquaintance? We have not met since those days at Geneva—Count Degenthal," he added, as the director seemed not to recognise him.

"Count Degenthal!" he repeated. "That is indeed a joyful surprise." The remembrance of past times overwhelmed him, and he could only hold out his two hands, which Curt shook heartily.

"I saw you this morning out riding," continued Degenthal, "and your face struck me at once as a well-known one."

"Sorrow has fallen upon my head since those days," said the director smiling. "I should not have recognised

you, Count Degenthal; but at your age that is a compliment. And the countess, your mother, how is she? I always think of her with the most heartfelt gratitude," and his voice trembled again.

"My mother is quite well, thank God. We have lived almost continually in our Moravian home; I have only left her for a few years at the university."

"So you wanted to enjoy a little of the German students' happy time. That was a good thought. Is your former tutor, the chaplain, still with you? He was kind enough to write to me now and then, but my travelling life makes me a bad correspondent."

"Oh yes! The chaplain is quite established at home; we cannot do without our kind friend. We have often thought of you and spoken of the days in Switzerland. It was Miss Nora, was it not, who was with you to-day?"

"It was my daughter," said the director; "she left the convent in which she was educated about six months ago, and has returned to me. I was at last able to take my child to live with me again, as I have a second wife."

Degenthal's face showed that he was somewhat astonished at this piece of news, and as the director noticed it, a short and awkward pause ensued.

"One requires a home and hearth to come to now and then in a restless life like mine. And I am getting old," began the director rather uncomfortably.

"Let me wish you joy," said Degenthal with good nature, in order to help him over this painful moment. "But may I not be allowed to renew my acquaintance with Miss Nora?"

"If you will do me the honour of calling upon us. At present I am staying at this hotel, but I intend to hire a villa, where my wife and daughter will be able to spend a few weeks. My wife must take care of herself, and my daughter has no part in my business."

"May I pay you a visit here?" asked Degenthal eagerly.

"If you will do me the honour," repeated the director with formality. It was easy to notice that he did not wish to move a step towards the young man.

"And when is the best time for me to find you at home?" said Degenthal.

"The mornings are completely taken up by my business, but in the evenings I give no representations—I am with my family. To-morrow, for instance, I shall be at home in the evening."

"Then I will call to-morrow. Please remember me meanwhile to Miss Nora," added Degenthal, with a warm shake of the hand.

"My daughter would never forgive me, were I to rob her of meeting you. She has not forgotten your kindness, Count Degenthal, any more than I have."

Whilst this animated conversation had been taking place, the young men at the table had watched the two, and at last Karsten also gave a look at the group.

"I think," said he, "that I see there a gentleman who deserves my best thanks as well as those of my daughter—the stout gentleman at the corner of the table. May I ask you to introduce me to him?"

"My friend, Dahnow? Yes, he told us of his adventure. Come with me . . . My dear fellow, Director Karsten wishes to speak with you. Director Karsten, Baron Dahnow—heavy Mecklenburg race!" Degenthal added jestingly.

"Unless I am much mistaken, Baron Dahnow, you are the person who this morning helped my daughter so kindly out of her difficulty," said the director, with the simple and easy manner of the man of the world.

"My figure unfortunately forbids incognito, so that I cannot modestly disclaim the valorous exploit. Moreover,

fortune favoured me in allowing me to be of some use to "so lovely a lady," answered Dahnow gallantly. The director bowed. "If you will allow me," he then continued coolly, "I will go and fetch my thanks from the lady herself, by availing myself of a portion of the permission you have just given my friend Degenthal."

"I shall be delighted to receive you," said the director; "although my wife and daughter live very retired, it will certainly give them pleasure to become acquainted with these gentlemen."

It was now Dahnow's turn to bow.

"Come, director! Do join our party, and let us drink a glass at the pleasure of having met you again," said Degenthal.

"Indeed, I should like it of all things; but my time is up. Moreover, my grey head is not fit to be seen amongst so many young ones; it is only at one time of life that we can be so happy and careless. Pray, excuse me, Count Degenthal."

Degenthal once more shook hands with Karsten, who then departed, after having sent a comprehensive bow to the whole group.

"What a handsome man, and how uncommonly well-bred he looks!" said one of the young men, following him with his eyes. "No one would be able to guess what he really is."

"He was much talked of at one time. Some thought he was the illegitimate son of some nobleman or other; then it was said that he was an officer who had been compelled to leave the army on account of debts; then, that he was a wandering Jew, who had learnt American humbug."

"If he is a Jew, *I* am one!" exclaimed a broad-shouldered Westphalian, with a loud voice,—and certainly his pug nose and fair hair exonerated him from any suspicion of the kind. "Have you ever seen him on horse-

back? The man seems made of iron, and his talent is no humbug."

"Dahnow, you're not wanting in pluck, I must say," said another one, "going and inviting yourself like that! At all events, you might have had the good feeling of including us in your cool invitation of yourself; we might all have gone and paid our respects to the lovely creature.'

"I thought a deputation *en masse* was not a bit necessary," said Dahnow laconically.

"Never mind! we shall see the beauty all the same," cried the one whose hilarity was caused by the fruit of the vine. "Degenthal, you lucky dog! this glass to your beauty! Don't be so cruel as to conceal her from our sight! . . . Three cheers for Nora Karsten!"

Degenthal sprang up. His eyes shot fire, his forehead glowed, and his voice trembled with emotion, as he cried out, "Sir, you have not the right of using thus the name of a lady whom "——

But whatever he may have intended to say remained unheard, although every one had turned to him with astonishment, for at the same instant two freshly brought bottles fell upon the table with a great clatter. They wrought destruction amongst the glasses, and their contents flowed like a stream upon the table-cloth. There followed a moment of great confusion; every one inquired the cause of the event, and every one attempted to save his own glasses. Waiters hastened to clear away the shattered bits, and the sitting was interrupted.

Dahnow caught Degenthal by the arm. "Come with me," he said gravely; "we have had enough of it. A little fresh air and a glass of beer will do no harm after all this stuff. Come, before the others notice us."

Degenthal hesitated a moment, and then made up his mind to follow his friend.

"The bottles and the glasses you shall pay for," said Dahnow, in his dry short way, as they left the dining-room. "I have done enough by the friendly service of having broken them."

"You did it on purpose?" asked Degenthal astounded.

"How could I otherwise have put a stop to your display of oratory? A good cause is worth a few pieces of broken glass."

"Why did you interrupt me?" continued Degenthal eagerly. "It is too bad to make such public ill-use of a lady's name. I really cannot understand your reason for preventing my giving these people a piece of my mind."

"Firstly, because words thus spoken miss their aim; secondly, because I have too great a respect for any lady, in whatever position she may be, to bring her into a students' quarrel. Do you suppose that a duel between you and the 'Courländer' on her account would be of much advantage to her?"

Degenthal was silent; he could not but admit to himself that his friend was right. But he felt put out, and asked again: "Why do you lay such a stress upon the words, 'in whatever position she may be placed?'"

"Simply because her father's position exposes her to being treated lightly."

"But she has nothing to do with his business, and has been kept away from it ever since her early childhood. She was brought up in one of the best convents in Belgium. Her mother was a very refined and well-educated woman, who expired in my mother's arms. Our acquaintanceship also dates from that time. Her father was rich enough to give her a good education, you know."

"For all that, my dear Degenthal, it is a difficult position for the poor girl," said Dahnow again. "And are you really going there to-morrow?"

"Of course," answered Degenthal; "nothing is more

natural. My mother also will be delighted to have news of the little Nora, in whom we all took such an interest."

Dahnow seemed rather doubtful of the countess's great delight on hearing this news, but he wisely held his peace.

"Anyhow, it is a complicated case, upon which I would certainly consult my mother, if I had one," he said in the half-ironical tone he often assumed when talking with his young friend.

CHAPTER V.

IT was not far from the town, and it was a charming villa; just such an one as the inhabitant of the Rhine country delights to build: so fresh and so graceful. It was surrounded by the vine, and by green foliage, and a real nosegay of brilliant flowers, which charmed the eye from afar; and it was built close upon the road, for the social "Rheinländer" likes to see the goers-by, and forces nature to display her beauties even in a town.

From one of the windows was, moreover, a view of old Father Rhine, of his green waves and his surrounding green mountains, without a sight of which the "Rheinländer" cannot exist.

Director Karsten had hired the villa for his wife and daughter, and they were to spend the summer months in this beautiful country. He had, moreover, surrounded them with a luxury such as men who have earned their money like to display. He who has inherited his fortune from his fathers is not so fond of exhibiting it, whilst he who has earned it is wont to fill the cup of luxury and ostentation to the very brim. It is natural that it should be so: when a man knows that he has earned his fortune, and that he can add to it every day, he feels more at liberty to spend it—it has cost him more labour, it seems

just that it should give him more pleasure. It is different when a fortune is left one, with the sacred duty of preserving it by wisdom and prudence.

Moreover, the one requires outward show in order to keep up his position, whilst the other need not trouble himself about a thing he so naturally possesses. The more doubtful the social position, the more luxury is displayed. Director Karsten acted unconsciously according to this rule.

Nora sat in her lovely little boudoir, which was adjacent to the drawing-room. She was in her favourite corner in the bow-window, from which she could gaze at the beautiful view. She was dreaming of days gone by. It was May now, and she had left the convent's quiet walls in November. What gay and brilliant images of life had passed before her since then! There was a smile upon her lips as she thought over it, for none of her sombre presentiments had come true; on the contrary, it seemed to her as if she ought to arm herself on all sides against the soft life of comfort which surrounded her now, and which was so different from the quiet gravity of her former years. Her father had received her with open arms, and had but one thought—that of heaping all the sweets of life upon her. In her step-mother Nora had found a kind-hearted and harmless creature, who was still very full of the honour of being the director's wife. She was fair, and had rosy cheeks, and had been the prettiest amongst her companions of the circus, who greatly envied her her good-luck. The director had said the complete truth in alleging that, if he took a second wife, it was in order to have his daughter with him. He longed for that which he had once possessed—a home-circle around his hearth, a spot in which to refresh himself now and then from his travelling life: and he was too old to seek a companion in a new set. His choice had

fallen upon Miss Emily, the humblest of his amazons, because she was renowned for her good temper, and enjoyed a fair name—so rare a treasure in those circles. Her blue eyes, which clearly expressed her great admiration for him, had brought matters to a point.

Mrs. Karsten knew full well that one of the conditions of her happiness would be that Nora and she should be on good terms; it was, moreover, in her nature to be so; she was far too light-hearted and fond of an easy life not to receive her step-daughter in a friendly manner. Nora accepted her advances with simple geniality. Mrs. Karsten was not, and could not be, a companion, in all the sense of the word, to a person of Nora's distinction and refinement of feeling; but she was merry and pleasant. In Nora's presence she was not quite at her ease, for she felt her step-daughter's superiority of mind and of education; but this only served to conceal the faults which might have made Mrs. Karsten disagreeable, and so, matters had taken a very happy turn for Nora. Her continual travels during the last six months and her residence in great capitals had occupied her mind sufficiently to prevent her realising the solitude of her life; and, surrounded as she was by luxury and comfort, she felt herself in the social position to which her tastes and education fitted her.

And now the family had settled down for the first time, so that Nora enjoyed the delights of home—delights so dear to a woman's heart. Her step-mother had entrusted her with the entire superintendence of this little realm. Mrs. Karsten would have been unequal to it, and she preferred giving herself up entirely to the comfort and luxury she was surrounded by. Nora, who had inherited her father's talent for organisation, gave everything "the certain air" which only a lady knows how to bestow on the objects about her. The director only came now and then to the villa, his troop having been sent to different

neighbouring towns, in separate detachments, which he was forced to go and look after now and then.

It had been a happy hour to Nora that in which she once more mounted a horse, and a horse she could call her own. It was the only point upon which she had not followed the advice of her trusty old friend.

She had written a letter full of the goodness of her father, who had just given her one of his handsomest horses, and the Mother Superior had answered, somewhat to her disappointment, "Would it not be better for you, my dear child, considering the position you are in, to give up the amusement of riding?"

For the first time, the young girl threw her experienced friend's letter away with some impatience; her red lips pouted slightly, and a tear stood in her eyes.

She was her father's own daughter; as a child, had she not been passionately fond of putting her strength, her skill, and her courage to the proof, by riding fiery horses? And so she now loved the exercise with redoubled love, because she had been so long deprived of it. There was—she felt it—some truth in the nun's words, but when we ardently wish something, we generally find excellent reasons for doing it. "Do leave me this joy," she answered; "it is the only one which brings me once more quite close to papa." The nun wrote no more upon the subject, and Nora did not hear the faint sigh with which she read those lines.

It was true that riding brought Nora and her father more closely together, and it was a proud and happy moment to Director Karsten, when he watched his daughter on horseback, and saw his talent reproduced in her. He sometimes felt a sting when he remembered the promise made to his wife; but it was only a sting, and he did not put it into words.

Nora did not know the reason why, but she felt as if,

all of a sudden, she had found that which she had longed for in life, longed for in a misty sort of way. She felt that some great happiness had come upon her, but she could not as yet give it a name. There was a reflection of it upon her face as she sat in the bow-window. How pleasantly her morning had passed away. Quite early she had had a gallop on her horse, she had governed her little household, and now she held in her hand a grave and interesting book, in which she intended to bury herself; for she followed the advice of her good Mother Superior, and did not put her pious reading aside.

But the bright May morning was hardly favourable to reading. She looked up at every moment, and gazed at the gay landscape, or else caught hold of some of the green foliage shooting up against the window-sill.

All of a sudden she turned and welcomed, with a radiant look, a person who had just entered. "Oh, I am so glad! How nice of you to come at last, Count Degenthal," she cried joyously; "it is impossible to do anything on such a sunny day." So saying, she closed her book, laid it down, and met him half way.

"So I may come in, may I?" said the young man. "But don't let me send you away from your favourite corner."

"No, you are right; there is no better place for a good chat," she said simply, and returned to her seat.

He sat down opposite her. It was easy to perceive by the way they met, and by the natural manner in which each of them spoke, that these visits were not unusual.

"Well now, tell me what the sun prevented your reading?" he asked, and held out his hand towards the book, which she at once pushed towards him. "Dear me! How very serious! You make a fellow quite ashamed of himself, by taking your flight into such regions."

"I must make up for my ignorance by a little reading,"

she said with a sigh; "I require it more than you do. The complete want of anything serious and deep is what I feel the most here; you alone can understand and teach me." Her blue eyes rested so calmly and gratefully upon him, that the young man felt a strange sensation at his heart.

"I can't say that I am a very hopeful subject as far as serious thinking is concerned," he said in a somewhat embarrassed tone. "I do nothing but dream and lose my time. If it were not the life of a student which only comes once, I really should regret it. But you, Miss Nora, you have only just escaped from school. Look here, I have brought you a book which is perhaps more fit for reading on a bright sunny day in the month of May. You complained of having nothing to read." . . .

"Have you brought me something?" said Nora, gladly taking possession of the prettily bound book with gold edges. "I had nothing but my lesson books, I may say, and I did not know who could advise me anything else. But may I read this, do you think?" she added hesitatingly.

The young man did not smile at this ingenuous question; he was too well aware of the restrictions a prudent education places upon a girl's reading, and not the cleverest observation would have pleased his own mode of feeling, so much as Nora's extreme conscientiousness.

"My mother herself would recommend it to you," he said. "It is a choice from our best German poets. I have already thought with pleasure of reading you some of them. Do you know this one, for instance?" he asked, and bending over the book, he read her some of the strophes.

He read well, and Nora listened with pleasure to his voice, as well as to that which he read. They were

serious and melancholy words. Youth loves melancholy as old age likes to be amused; and the words were thoroughly poetical. Nora's easily moved nature, with the poetical fibre she had inherited from her mother, made her particularly sensible to the charms of true poetry. His manner of reading brought out the most beautiful passages in all their light. The words, and the thoughts they expressed, found their echo in each of their hearts. As they sat there, those two, their hearts beating with a nameless quivering, they hardly knew that some other magic, greater than poets' words or May enchantment, was spreading itself over them.

That is, indeed, the charm of first love. It is a charm from heaven, which, in its magic purity, joins soul to soul and heart to heart, and neither one knows that the eyes' brilliancy captivates the pressure of the hand which links the one to the other.

No second love, however true, deep, and sweet it may be, can be compared to it, or is so free from all earthly fetters. It may be, it often is, rapid as lightning, and yet we remember it our life long with a sweet sadness.

Degenthal had for a few weeks been a constant visitor at the villa; it had all come so naturally, that one hardly realised how long his visits were. At his first call, which he had made with Dahnow, Nora had been shy and embarrassed. Years had passed since they had met, and their intimacy as children made the young girl feel less at ease than with a complete stranger.

"A school-girl, and nothing more!" Dahnow had said in a somewhat disappointed tone. "She is no dangerous syren, or else she would not brush down her hair so unbecomingly upon her forehead. There is not even the interest of saving a poor persecuted creature from her wicked step-mother. The fair creature is the very personification of good-nature, and seems rather to be in awe of

her step-daughter than otherwise. Sad thing! even a circus company does not afford any interest nowadays; for a pretty and awkward girl one can find anywhere," he had muttered angrily. Dahnow had soon after been obliged to go home on business, and was still away. Degenthal, on the other hand, had not sought anything "piquant" in his meeting with Nora. He had wished to see the girl who had interested him so much in years gone by, and whose destiny had so often occupied his thoughts. He could not get rid of the idea that she had been in some way confided to him at that moment in which he had stood with her by her mother's death-bed.

We will not discuss the probabilities of what would have happened had he found Nora plain and unsympathetic; we are inclined to believe that he would not have considered his duty of protecting and watching over her in so forcible a light. As it was, she was beautiful; and what charmed him, perhaps, even more, education had given her that grace which, on account of the harmony it lends to a person, is well termed *le bon ton.* Curt Degenthal had been brought up almost exclusively by his mother, and was accustomed to the society of good women; so that, in the midst of his student life, it was a great pleasure to him to be once more with a woman in all the best sense of the word. He was, of course, more at liberty to see her than had she belonged to any other family; and the remembrance of their childhood had wrought a sort of brother's and sister's link between them.

Mrs. Karsten, highly flattered at the visit of a count, had at first taken part in the conversation; but Degenthal's whole being and manners and ideas were something so different from her own, that she did not find him to her taste, and soon left Nora and him undisturbed. An eavesdropper would have been surprised at the grave tone of

the conversation kept up between those two young people. But they were both gifted with deep and serious natures; and both were happy at being able to rest from the void they found in the outer world.

Curt's ideas were hers, his habits were those she had been brought up in, and, above all, the youth possessed an indispensable quality in her eyes. He had a firm spirit of faith, and a deep and true piety, which, without any sort of demonstration, he acted upon, and spoke up to. Accustomed as she was to a convent life, Nora had sadly felt standing alone in her religious ideas. Her step-mother was nominally of a different faith, and her father had long forgotten the precepts and examples his gentle and pious wife had tried to inculcate. Nora often hoped, in her heart of hearts, that the day would come when his faith would live a new life in him; but she felt that such a day was far off.

It was, therefore, all the more pleasant for her to agree with Curt upon the point of religion also. Indeed, he entered into her views with the gravity and depth of one who felt that he must be her support and stay. He often wondered to himself how her life would turn out; but that was the only point she never touched upon. And, indeed, he as often put the thought away, and only lived to enjoy the present. He had written to his mother that he had met Nora, and recounted how he had met her; but as his mother only treated the meeting as a matter of very secondary importance, he had written no more upon the subject.

By degrees there came other visitors to the villa. Nora was too inexperienced to notice that they were only men, and those from the set of young students. It is part of the gold-winged liberty at the university that a student may visit and rove where he chooses.

Mrs. Karsten was delighted at having a circle of ad-

mirers to whom she could show off her smart gowns, and the director was not sorry, either, to find a little society whenever he was able to come home. Nora never took any part in public amusements, like theatres and concerts, of which Mrs. Karsten was particularly fond. It is possible that a grave look of Curt had strengthened her in her resolution, when once her step-mother had proposed something of the sort in his presence; but she was all the more delighted when excursions were made, either on horseback or on foot, and when she could enjoy the lovely views which were to be had from so many surrounding spots. A few young men generally formed part of these excursions; but it was like an understood thing, that Nora never went unless Curt could accompany her. She felt as if his presence gave her at once protection and security. Nor was she wrong; for his grave and respectful manner kept his companions within closer bounds than they would have considered necessary with such ladies.

Weeks had thus gone by; there had been many a visit like the one made upon that May morning, and Curt and Nora had been full of a pure, and, as yet, unembarrassed pleasure in each other's presence.

It was on one of the last days of the same month of May that a merry party set out, in enjoyment of the beautiful weather, upon the road which leads to the ancient "Rolandseck." Mrs. Karsten, her small black hat adorned with a red feather, stuck coquettishly upon her fair locks, looked captivating enough to keep the young men in her train. Her pert answers and her merry laughter were in good accordance with her *retroussé* nose, and acted with so charming an effect upon the students, that they willingly ignored the fact that she was perhaps just a wee bit vulgar. But Mrs. Karsten could not always play at dignity; and it was a great relief to her when she saw her step-daughter walking on before

her, and she slackened her pace in order to enjoy a little liberty.

Curt was at Nora's side. They were both deep in a conversation which completely absorbed them. Nora walked quickly, for she liked to be the first to see a lovely view, and to see it undisturbed. The two soon arrived at the old arch, from which they could look out upon the winding stream and the green isle down below—upon the panorama of mountains and woods, of towns and villages—upon the harmonious mixture of the grave charms of nature, and of the most animated signs of human habitation.

Curt did not look at the view to-day; his eye rested upon his companion, who leant upon the old walls and gazed dreamily out upon the landscape. One point in it seemed particularly to draw her attention, and to make her forget everything else. Nora had remained faithful to the simple habits of her convent-home. She wore a plain and soft spring gown, and her broad-brimmed straw hat threw a deep shadow upon her face, and covered the dressing of her hair, which Baron Dahnow had found such fault with. Nora was lovely indeed; but her beauty was as yet that undeveloped loveliness of extreme youth, which seeks rather to retire than to attract, and of which the expression is still closed like a bud.

Curt seemed to find something particularly enigmatical in those eyes to-day, so attentively did he watch the handsome profile against its background of ivy. Suddenly he started; he had seen a tear gather slowly under the dark eyelashes, and steal down her cheek. "Nora!" he exclaimed, and bent anxiously over her.

She looked up at him, her eyes still moist, but a smile on her lips.

"*Sir Knight, true sisterly love,*" . . . .

She said jokingly. "Poor Toggenburger!"

Curt drew himself back; the words displeased him.

"Why do you say that, of all things, Miss Nora? What made you think of it?" he asked, just a little crossly.

"Thought of what?" she asked in her turn. "Of the noble Toggenburger? No; I was only quoting that passage, as it has been quoted a thousand times here. But I will tell you what I was thinking about. That convent down yonder, surmounted by its cross, recalled to me the happy days spent in my dear convent, so that I had quite a fit of longing for it."

"And, therefore, you thought of the faithful knight and of his cruel beauty?"

"Why cruel? Is it not beautiful to love God alone, so that one can give one's heart to no one else? I have one friend who was capable of doing it, another who will do it some day. To love God with one's whole soul, with all one's power, with all one's thoughts—there is nothing more beautiful, more enviable!" she said with deep feeling; and in her eyes could be read the longing of which she had just spoken.

It produced a strange effect upon Curt to see her thus.

"I do believe you would also be capable of making a poor knight suffer for love of you," he said, in a somewhat constrained tone of joking.

"Alas, for that good Toggenburger!" she said smiling. "He was just a little tiresome with his eternal gazing at her. What was that which you read yesterday? . . . There are other and greater things to take up one's time than a May love."

"But if one cannot conquer it?"

"Oh! But one must be able to conquer," said Nora decisively, with all the energy of youth—the secret of which is generally that as yet it has no need to conquer. And looking once more towards the convent, she continued:

"One may not dispute a heart with God; if it belongs to Him, it is impossible to turn it away from Him."

"But, Miss Nora, *you* don't mean" . . . . exclaimed Curt, horror-struck.

"It would be the very happiest thing, perhaps, and precisely for me," she whispered, as if to herself, with inexpressible melancholy.

At the same moment the voices of the others were heard. She turned away from him, and walked quickly towards her step-mother who had just arrived at the summit with the rest of the party.

Loud questions assailed her as to her having gone on before; and she answered them joyously and gaily, with all the grace and ease she had possessed in society from her childhood upwards.

The party was glad to sit down upon the grass and the large stones under the shadow of the old ruin after so fatiguing a walk. Wine was drank and songs were sung. Little girls with the clear and merry eyes, generally to be seen on the Rhine, came and brought May flowers and ivy wreaths, with which hats and button-holes were adorned. From the stream one could hear the sound of a glad music, or of happy human voices, so that the very air seemed to dance for joy, as it does in the merry Rhineland.

Curt alone remained silent amidst the gay circle. Nora's words had struck deep into his heart, and had called forth a string of ideas from which he could not rid himself. Did she feel that the convent was her vocation? Had she perhaps already made up her mind in that direction? Was she so gay and so natural because her mind was at rest? Curt had often heard that the gayest of the gay made up their minds the most easily to retire into a convent, and to taste of the joys of solitude and prayer.

And then came the question—Why could not he bring himself to rejoice at the thought? Would it not be, after

all, as she had said—the best thing that could happen to her—the safest haven even from a worldly point of view?

But all the same, the very idea made him feel indignant. She was handsome, she was clever and charming, and why should she be forced to retire from the world, because the world, forsooth, had no proper place to offer her? Was she to be buried behind cloister walls, because there was no spot on earth to which she could belong!

Curt had been brought up to respect the religious vocation, but in this instance, he also spoke of "prison walls" and of Nora being "buried alive." At last he became convinced that she looked upon the convent as the best way out of the difficulties her mode of life offered her.

It was evening when the party returned in a boat upon the Rhine. Nora sat opposite to Curt. Her hat lay at her side, and her head was enveloped in a white shawl; her hands were placidly folded together and rested upon her knees; and upon her features lay the expression of thoughtful melancholy into which the stillness of night, the moonshine, and the gentle swaying of the waves, so often rock us.

Curt thought she looked dreadfully nun-like; his doubts seemed confirmed, and he read nothing but resignation and sacrifice in that lovely face of hers. He felt a cold pang at his heart, and unconsciously the words forced themselves from his lips: "Don't go to the convent, Nora! please don't go!" he whispered, bending towards her.

Nora looked up at him astonished. But in every woman's heart there is a concealed hobgoblin, who tells her when it lies in her power to torment the stronger sex, just a little bit. And the hobgoblin made her put on a demure face, and say with an imperceptible smile: "Why not? You know that it is the most admirable of all callings?"

Curt was silent; he had a sort of feeling that he had done a regularly stupid thing. He was glad that the boat touched shore at that moment, and that he could part from his friends under the plea of a headache, which served also to explain his former silence.

His dreams were agitated that night. He always saw Nora behind a grating, and he felt that he alone could rescue her,—only that he did not quite know how.

Perhaps his dreams would have been brighter, had he known that Nora lay awake long, and that, with burning cheeks pressed upon her pillow, she repeated to herself this one and self-same question: "Why was he so much against my going to the convent, although he is so good and pious?"

CHAPTER VI.

DAHNOW had returned to Bonn after an absence of three months. "Where is Degenthal?" he had asked in a tone of surprise, at not seeing him in the circle of friends which had assembled to welcome him.

"Ah! Degenthal, indeed!" had been the answer, accompanied by shrugging of shoulders and mysterious smiles; "he has other business on his hands; one hardly sees him at all now."

"O love! O love! Thou art so wondrous fair!" sang another, with a pathetic intonation, and laying his hand on his heart.

"What is the matter with him?" exclaimed Dahnow impatiently, and throwing furious looks at them. "What do you mean with all that nonsense? What do you expect from him?"

"We expect nothing from him; but he seems to expect something from other people. Perhaps it is hard work which makes him so scarce; perhaps he is studying the fine arts in the villa."

"Now, really, you're too bad," interrupted the Westphalian. "You're worse than a set of old maids. Degenthal was continually with us until quite a short time ago; and I am sure some of you are often enough in the villa

too. Can nobody look at a pretty girl, without the whole world beginning to gossip about it!"

"It only depends on how often and how long one looks at her!" said another laughing. "Degenthal, anyhow, is giving himself that pleasure *à fond*."

"That's an exaggeration. He went away a few days ago. He had the idea of going up the Rhine, or else he would certainly have been here to-day. He often asked after you, Dahnow."

Dahnow breathed again. He had heard nothing from Degenthal during his absence, and though that was not so extraordinary, considering that he was a man, and that men are not over fond of letter-writing, his friends' hints had raised an uncomfortable feeling in him. He would ask no more. In the evening, after leaving his companions who had arranged a supper to celebrate his return, the Westphalian and he walked on a few yards together.

"I say, Clemens," began the former, after a moment's silence, "you might say something to Degenthal about it; your parents were old friends. I didn't like to admit it to the other ones; but I don't like the looks of it either. He is always at the villa, and has completely retired from the rest of us."

"What villa are you talking of?" asked Dahnow.

"Why, of course, of the one in which the circus-rider, Karsten, lives with his family. It's not a proper set for him, although they do live so luxuriously. The girl is handsome. I have seen her riding once or twice; but it would be really a pity if Degenthal were to ally himself there."

"Oh, nonsense!" said Dahnow. "Is that all? He knows the family of old. I believe the girl spent some time with the Degenthals. The countess happened to know her mother—childhood friends."

"Go to with your childhood-friendships, my good fellow:

put fire and straw together and you'll have a flame," said the prudent Westphalian. "It has befallen better people than they, ere this. I tell you again, warn him!"

"Have you also been there?" asked Dahnow.

"No; some of the fellows go there. It seems that they are quite respectable people, and I don't wish to say anything against them, or against the girl either, for the matter of that. But in our country one remains amongst equals, and then there is no sort of foolery possible. But from Degenthal's frequent visits, only one of two things can result—either he will be made unhappy, or the girl will be."

"Oh, nonsense," said Dahnow again. "You Westphalians shut yourselves up under lock and key: one can't expect that of every one."

"As yet it has not proved a very bad system. Do as you like, however, I have warned you."

"We shall see," said Dahnow soothingly. "Degenthal knows what he is about."

The Westphalian shrugged his shoulders and went his way.

Dahnow himself was not as calm as he chose it to be believed. "I must look after the youth a little," he said to himself. "The fact is, that he has all the characteristics necessary for doing foolish things all his life long—too good to be frivolous, too enthusiastic to be reasonable."

It proved, however, rather a difficult task to Dahnow to "look after" Degenthal during the first days which followed his arrival, for he could not succeed in seeing him. He called continuously and received the same answer each time, viz., that his young friend was "not at home."

"Perhaps he is turned sensible and set off upon a journey," the good fat creature said soothingly to himself. Anyhow, he made up his mind to go to the villa and see how matters stood there. Having already called upon the

director, it was quite natural that he should do so again upon his return.

It was thus that one fine afternoon Dahnow endeavoured to place his outward man in accordance with his projected visit, and strolled off to the villa.

He was ushered into the presence of the director's wife, who received him in the most friendly manner, and asked after his home. She then questioned him about his journey; and when her voluble tongue brought her sometimes into committing more than one geographical error upon Mecklenberg, he bore it without a smile, and tried to lead her back to her own country. She was not, however, to be brought to do anything else but to ask questions concerning himself.

Dahnow's grey eyes had meanwhile kept roaming about the drawing-room, until at last they fell upon the bow-window which opened on to the garden. There he saw two figures going up and down, and evidently completely engrossed in animated converse. Mrs. Karsten followed the direction of his gaze.

"Your friend is here," she said, "and will certainly be delighted to see you. Dear me! Count Degenthal is so dreadfully serious that I always run away when he and my daughter begin one of their deep conversations. Shall we call in those two wise-acres?" she asked with a coquettish glance at Dahnow: "or shall we leave them to their profound talk?" She did not seem averse to her *tête-à-tête* with the charming baron who could chatter so well.

Dahnow, however, clothed his wish to pay his respects to Miss Nora in as polite language as he could, and the director's wife jumped up, and skipped to the window with a light and airy grace, rapping her knuckles upon the pane as a sign for the two to come in. "Now, I am sure, you will all turn as serious and as grave as judges—*ter-*

riblement sérieux"—she added, looking up at Dahnow with a childlike pouting. She decidedly thought the baby style was the one which would please the baron the most. "So now, *sauve qui peut!* I hope we shall see you often," she said at last, and before her step-daughter had entered the room, she had left it.

Degenthal's face showed more surprise than pleasure on finding himself so suddenly in the presence of his friend, and Dahnow was too much taken up by Nora's looks, as she stood there and greeted him in a friendly manner, to notice him. What had come over her since Dahnow had seen her last? That was no longer the gawky and almost repelling creature whom he had so summarily described as an awkward school-girl. Her whole appearance was changed; or, was it only the light summer dress which showed her off to such advantage? Was it, perhaps, that the dark masses of her hair no longer covered her forehead, but fell back in rich locks upon her well-shaped neck? Each line, each fold about her dress, showed the thoroughly feminine wish to be at her best. Her eyes were so bright, her mouth so smiling, that Dahnow thought he had never seen any one so captivating before.

"So you're back already, old fellow?" said Degenthal, laying his hand upon his friend's shoulder. "I had no idea of the reason why we were called in."

"Already? humph!" said Dahnow, and his look turned from Nora to his friend, with a merry twinkle of his grey eyes. "Already? These three months have evidently passed quickly with you, and you have not missed me much. Haven't you found a respectable packet of my cards at your hotel? I have been trying in vain to get at you for the last eight days."

"Really!" said Degenthal absently.

He only seemed to have eyes for Nora, who now turned away towards the bow-window. "The fact is I was absent

a few days, I was busy—I had not heard that you had returned."

"Yes; I have altogether come to the melancholy conclusion that you can exist without me. What have you been doing all this summer, Miss Nora, which has struck my friend with a sudden mutism? Or was he so overwhelmed by study that he has also left you to your fate?"

"Oh no," said Nora warmly. "Count Degenthal has shown himself to be a very kind friend. He came almost daily; indeed, I don't know how the days would have gone by without him." As she said this, she felt Dahnow's sharp glance bent fixedly upon her, and her face glowed with a rosy tint. "The summer spent in this lovely country has flown away like a dream," she said, looking pensively before her.

"Why as a dream?" asked Degenthal, with a sudden anxiety in his voice.

"Because we shall soon break up, and have to plant our tent elsewhere—and then all will be changed," she said, with a melancholy intonation.

Degenthal looked inquiringly at her, and the question seemed to tremble on his lips.

Dahnow began to feel the truth of the proverb: "Two is company and three is none," in all its force, when Degenthal suddenly said: "You have certainly a great deal to tell me about your journey. Unfortunately I may not remain here any longer. . . . Miss Nora, please present my homages to your mother. . . . We shall meet, old friend, either to-night or to-morrow, and you will then tell me all your news."

Dahnow had also risen, and was just going to say that he would accompany Degenthal, but the latter had already seized hold of his hat, and was taking a hasty leave of Miss Karsten.

For a moment Nora's hand rested in his. "I may come again one of these days, mayn't I?" he said. "You will not be removing your tent quite so soon?" And with a hasty "farewell" he was gone.

Poor Dahnow was rather perplexed by this sudden disappearance. He had secretly made up his mind to profit by their return home for putting in a serious word of warning, and now his friend slipped out of his hands.

His travelling adventures did not seem either to excite much interest in the fair lady's breast, for as he turned he saw her eyes fixed upon the garden, through which Curt's retreating figure could be seen. Was it also by accident that she pressed the carnation she had brought with her from the garden to her lips, as if to inhale its fragrance?

Clemens Dahnow might really have thought of something more sensible just then—but as it was, one thing alone was clear to him, and that was how he would have liked to be that carnation, coming into so close a contact with that sweet mouth.

Two hours later, Dahnow, in a high state of excitement, was going up and down his room with unequal and impatient strides. He was a thorough northern German, who likes to fight it out with himself between the four walls of his own room. The southerner, on the contrary, likes to rush out into the open air, and cool down in the freedom of nature. His four walls comprised, it is true, all kinds of homely comforts, for, there again, a true son of the north, he liked to carry his home about with him, and to be thoroughly comfortable even though a student in a university town. As a rule, all his thinking powers were at work, whilst he lay upon his sofa and quietly puffed a Havannah; but on the present occasion all sort of repose was out of the question, that was quite evident, or else what could have induced him to take such violent exercise on so sultry a summer day? "Something must be done!"

He went on repeating to himself, "Something must be done! One cannot let the youth run headlong into such a piece of folly. He can never think of marrying her,—and to make *that* girl wretched would be the height of wickedness. Something must be done!"

Notwithstanding this repeated declaration, nothing *was* done for the present; unless it was that he got nearer his writing-desk, and looked at it as if there lay the difficulty of acting.

"One must make his mother acquainted with it—it is a duty I owe my friend—perhaps I am still in time to prevent it. That's the result of women bringing up boys exclusively; the last good girl they have come across can do what she likes with them."

And yet, after this speech, Dahnow felt something like contrition, as Nora's lovely face arose before him. He somehow could not bring himself to call Nora the last good girl.

"True, she would turn an old philosopher's head," he grumbled; "but that's all the reason more. He has no right to make that charming woman unhappy, and his position prevents, absolutely prevents, his thinking of such a marriage."

Perhaps Danhow's thoughts wandered a little over to himself, and to the fact that *he* had no position to sustain. He belonged to a good old family, but he was quite independent to do as he chose. His two elder brothers had already taken precautions against the dying out of the name, so that the youngest of the family was answerable to no one for his actions—and might choose where and how he liked.

It is strange, however, to mark how constantly men thus situated remain bachelors. Even in order to guide one's boat into the haven of matrimony, the "whens and hows" are necessary, and those who are not swayed by these particles remain often to be blown about outside. At that

moment, Dahnow did not seem to regret his not having a position to keep up, for something like a smile passed over his face. He tore himself, however, heroically away from this train of thought, in order to return to his friend.

"His mother must be told of it—that's a matter of conscience," was his repeated conclusion.

"The best would be for her to call him away on business. Enthusiasts, like him, also forget easily; but she would never forgive me, his elder friend, for not having warned her in time. A circus rider's daughter—that would, indeed, suit the old countess to a T!"

At last Baron Dahnow sat down at his writing-desk, heaving a heavy sigh the while. It was a long time before he could get his pen into swing, but eventually the paper was covered by the small, neat, and firm handwriting, which revealed much of his inner man. After he had made the last flourish under his name, he threw the pen away from him as if it burnt him.

"Odious work, this tell-taling!" he muttered angrily. "And yet, one must not do a thing by halves if it must be done! It might also be good for the other party to learn how matters are standing. It is better to crush at once the delicate hope of catching the young count, which the step-mother seems to be nurturing. Moreover, I liked the man's appearance; he has also a right to save his daughter from bitter experiences."

Thus, Dahnow once more seized hold of his pen, in order to concoct a letter which did not seem more easy to him than the other one had been. As soon as he had finished this second letter, he sealed and addressed both of them hastily, and gave them at once to his servant to send.

He then arose, heaved a deep sigh, and threw himself into his easiest of arm-chairs, smoked one of his best cigars, and assured himself ten times over in five minutes that he had acted for the best. Had he, however, been

condemned to be hanged as a spy, he would have found it quite just, so miserable did he feel. "I'll be hanged if I don't tell the youth my mind about it, as soon as he comes, to-morrow, so as to bring him to reason." That was the last decision the worthy Mecklenburger came to upon that eventful day.

Resolutions—especially when they concern other people—are not such easy things to keep. "The youth" did not come on the morrow; and as the letters were gone, Dahnow's zeal cooled down a little.

A few days later on, however, he became uncomfortable at not seeing his friend. "As the mountain refused to go to Mahommed, I suppose that Mahommed must go to the mountain," he said philosophically, and attacked his friend in his den, as the students' phrase has it. It was not difficult for him to gain admittance. All the doors were open, so that he could enter Degenthal's room without even knocking.

Degenthal was lying back in the window-seat, his hand supporting his head, and seemed lost in thought. He only turned round when he heard Dahnow's steps quite close to him. For a moment he hesitated and looked up inquiringly into his friend's face, then he suddenly threw himself upon his neck.

"I am glad that you, my best friend, should be the first to wish me joy. I will have no secret from you. Clemens, she is mine! I possess her love! Her heart has belonged to me ever since her earliest childhood. I am the happiest of the happy to have got over all the odious indecision at last, to feel that all is clear between us."

"What is clear? Between whom? What are you talking about? Are you mad?" exclaimed Dahnow, shaking him impatiently off.

"Yes, mad with joy!" cried Curt, his eyes shining with a great brightness. "What am I talking about? Have you

noticed nothing? Has no suspicion crossed your mind? Why, of course, it's of Nora I am talking. Did you ever see a more beautiful creature. Do you know any one half so charming, and so lovable as she is?—and she is mine!"——

"Are you quite mad and blind, that you don't see what a horrible mess you have got into? Don't you see the enormity of the mistake you are going to commit?" thundered out his corpulent friend. "Must one tell it you to your face, that you have no right to gain the love of a girl you cannot think of marrying? You, Count Degenthal, and the daughter of a circus-rider! Have you really lost every grain of common sense?"

Degenthal turned away from his friend. "Can't you leave a fellow one hour of joy? I know all that will follow, but I wanted to think of my happiness during one whole day. It's only this morning that we have spoken of it to each other—only this morning that we have come to an understanding. My inward struggles are at an end at last; it has been such a miserable time."

"*Time* you also required for such madness," muttered Dahnow, sinking down into an arm-chair.

But Degenthal hardly seemed to hear him. "I thought it was otherwise," he said, pushing his hair off from his forehead, and leaning back once more in the window-seat. "I thought she had another vocation from which I could not turn her away."

A sceptical smile passed across Dahnow's lips.

"Particularly during the last days, when she all of a sudden drew back, and became more cold and more reserved. But she was only afraid of letting me guess her love!" he added, with a radiant expression lighting up his face. "It was this fear that she meant to become a nun, which prevented my speaking to her, for in my heart, I knew long ago that Nora, and Nora alone, could

fill it! Had I not had this fear, I would have asked her much sooner, so as not to keep her in suspense."

"I tell you once more," said Dahnow ill-humouredly, "that I cannot understand how you can thus break through all your principles."

"Principles!" exclaimed Degenthal. "There is one thing which has always been, which ever will be, stronger than so-called principles, and that is love. And, indeed, if it does not draw us into a vile action, it need not be at variance with our principles. Here, moreover, there has been quite a providential direction about it all. Nora was sent to me as a child, she lay in my arms on becoming motherless. Her mother blessed me too, and since then I have felt responsible for her destiny. That moment was also decisive for her education; she no longer belongs to the set chance placed her in. Such as she now is, she is worthy of occupying, nay, of gracing any position. Believe me, I have thought over it, and weighed it all well. But did you take me for such a brute as to have dared to claim her love, without any serious intention?" he added indignantly, and his eyes flashed fire.

Dahnow was silent awhile. He had been put out of conceit with himself by the manner in which his friend had blurted out his secret to him. He had been preparing himself day after day to draw it from him by degrees, and to warn him of some threatening danger, and now he found himself before an accomplished fact. Instead of finding Degenthal timid and hesitating and full of contrition, he found him standing proudly there, as if he had done the most sensible and the best weighed thing in the world. He hardly knew what to say.

"And your mother?" he asked at last.

"Yes, my mother!" said Degenthal. "It will be dreadful to her, and I debated a long time with myself on her account. I might perhaps have sacrificed my own hap-

piness to hers—but Nora's happiness was also at stake, her whole future depends upon it. As soon as my mother sees Nora and makes her acquaintance, she will like her; and will understand that it is only a name which divides us. Personally, she is just the sort of daughter-in-law my mother would have chosen."

"She had made other plans for you—plans which your social position made very advisable."

"I don't choose my life to be cut out for me," answered Degenthal angrily. "Should my mother consider the difficulties to be of an insurmountable nature, my younger brother may take possession of the property, and I shall content myself with his portion. Nora is worth more than anything in the world, and"——

"Curt, for heaven's sake, do think of what you are about!" exclaimed Dahnow. "Don't act in a moment of over-excitement; do listen to sensible advice!"

"I am not in a state of over-excitement. I am as calm as you yourself are. But say all you have to say; I shall be grateful to you for it." And Curt sat down quietly opposite his friend.

Dahnow, anxious at all events to do his duty, and having once more regained his composure, said all that can be said in such a case, and which has been said a hundred times over, always with the same result. Nay, he said it better than most people do, for he said it without exaggeration or violence, and in clear and concise language. But, at such a time, words fall like drops upon a heated stone; they hiss a little, but they make no other effect.

"I have weighed everything, and will surmount everything," was Degenthal's only reply.

"What do you intend to do as to her father?" asked Dahnow.

"I wrote, of course, to her father at once; he probably

has my letter already. Do you suppose that Nora is a girl who would consent to a secret engagement?"

"That into the bargain!" sighed Dahnow. But still he thought with some satisfaction, that, thanks to him, the letter would find the director prepared.

"I shall write to my mother to-day, and put the whole thing before her. I shall beg her not to judge Nora before she sees her."

"She won't see her at all, or I'm much mistaken in her! But it's quite useless to dispute the point any longer with you," said Dahnow rising. "It is difficult to understand how a man can build up his whole life upon a momentary feeling."

"Do you call a momentary feeling that which has been buried deep in my heart during all these weeks and months? Do you call a momentary feeling that which has sunk into my soul, like a bright spot of gold which can never change, and which will brighten my life to come? But had it only been the result of one moment, Dahnow, such moments are decisive. If such another pair of eyes existed, I would say to you: Old fellow, just try one look into them, and you will understand what such a moment can bring about." And with a smile, Curt laid his hand upon his friend's arm. "Do be kind, Dahnow, and wish me good luck."

"I cannot wish you good luck, it is such a dreadful piece of nonsense," said Dahnow, hardening himself against his own heart, "however poetically you may cook it up; do what you will, I shall always be against it."

The words were harsh, but he shook his friend's hand heartily all the same.

Dahnow was young himself. He had called his friend's determination a folly, but he knew full well that it is a folly which makes a man radiantly happy while it lasts. "If such another pair of eyes existed," Degenthal had said,

and the next day the wise and sensible Dahnow caught himself wondering whether he had ever seen such eyes, so childlike and pure, framed into such well-chiselled features; such deep-blue eyes, shaded by such long and jet-black lashes. Dahnow felt a longing about him, he did not quite know what for, and he very nearly said, "Lucky fellow," but there he stopped himself in time. "Folly and stupid nonsense! Let them get through it as they can! I wash my hands of it all."

CHAPTER VII.

AS a rule, disagreeable occurrences seem to take place at peculiarly inconvenient moments. Clemens Dahnow loved calm and repose—inwardly and outwardly; but of all the hours in which it was dear to him, he reckoned the morning hours as the best. To him a day was a failure when he had not been able to enjoy his morning repose, his morning coffee, his morning paper, and last, not least, his morning cigar. The Degenthal love affair had already disturbed his inward peace, and it now threatened to disturb his outward peace also.

A few days after their conversation had taken place, Degenthal rushed like a hurricane into his friend's room early in the morning, notwithstanding the protestations of the servant.

Dahnow was going to renew the protestations even more energetically, but a look at Degenthal silenced him: pale and upset, his visitor was evidently in a state of over-excitement, which prevented his realising time or place. "Read that," said Degenthal in a hoarse voice, handing Dahnow a letter, the crumpled state of which proved how its contents had worked upon the reader's feelings.

Degenthal meanwhile paced up and down the room.

Generally, love affairs have interest only for the actors in

them. During confidential saunters through green woods, or at evening with the stars above us, we sympathise with such snatches of the heart's history. But in the morning, let us say at half-past seven, when we are still comfortably ensconced amongst our pillows, and the morning sun is shining in upon our sleepy eyes, the tragical lover has little hope of getting much sympathy.

Dahnow read the letter bearing the director's signature with the most cold-blooded satisfaction.

It ran thus: "Sir,—Pray accept the expression of my appreciation of the great honour you have done me in proposing for my daughter's hand. You must allow me, at the same time, to tell you, once for all, that I am forced to refuse any such proposal, and that in the most positive manner. I do not doubt but that it is your sincere wish and intention to make the happiness of my daughter. Her youth alone is a sufficient reason for her marriage being for the present out of the question. But you will, moreover, never obtain the consent of your family to such a step, and from their point of view I can only consider their objections as justifiable. Our paths lie in a completely different direction. On my side, I shall never allow my daughter to enter into a family in which she will not be received with pleasure, and in which her marriage would only be a source of continual divisions and quarrels, the consequences of which would fall upon her. You yourself, dear count, have not measured, in the excitement of the moment, the extent of the difficulties you would rush into. My daughter fully recognises the justice of what I say. I will refrain from any reproach for your having gained her word before consulting me upon the subject, my daughter having told me of the strange mistake which brought the explanation about. One must not be too harsh with young people; but I very much regret having come to a knowledge of the facts so late. A

report had already warned me of what has unfortunately taken place. I must, however, entreat you, sir, to respect my decision entirely, and not to attempt to make my daughter falter in her resolution, nor to render the sacrifice more difficult to her. Do not try to find out where she is. We shall leave this country for a time. You will one day thank me yourself for the pain I am inflicting upon you now, the intensity of which I believe in, as also the sincerity of your intentions. Pray allow me to remain," &c.

"Sensible man!" burst from Dahnow's very soul; but before the words had been expressed, Degenthal seemed to have read them in his eyes.

He stood before him flushing angrily. "You find this, of course, perfect, charming, delightful, quite your own opinion," he said sarcastically and with a tremulous voice; "however miserable we may be made by this Philistine manner of looking at it. Oh! they have worried her to death, before they succeeded in getting *this* out of her," he cried exasperated; and throwing himself into a chair he buried his face in his hands.

Dahnow's feelings got the better of him.

"Poor boy!" he said as sympathetically as possible, holding out his hand to him. Inwardly, however, he thought even more sympathetically: "Poor girl!" For, strangely enough, we generally feel the love sorrows of an opposite sex more than those of our own. Once more the look with which she had followed Curt arose before him; that look in which all her heart had expressed itself. He did not quite understand how she should have bestowed that great love upon Curt; no man understands how a woman can be very much in love with another man. But it was so, and to think that the lovely girl was now looking as miserable as Curt sank very deep into the Mecklenberger's heart.

"Read that also," said Degenthal, handing him a second note, and perceiving the softer mood which had come over his friend. There were only a few words written in a girlish handwriting: "It was a beautiful, but a great mistake. It is better we should part. Farewell, and may God bless you.—NORA."

Dahnow sighed, and an uncomfortable pang at his conscience accused him of having also contributed to this misery. For a while the two friends were silent. But the more Dahnow thought of it, the more the matutinal and matter-of-fact view of the case took the upper hand. She was young and beautiful, and would forget him; others would comfort her, he thought.

"Do you know, old fellow," he began in the most conciliatory tones, "however sad it may be for the moment, her father is right; the separation is easier now, and you never would have been able to overcome the difficulties."

Degenthal started indignantly. "Do you really believe that I shall let matters remain as they are?" he cried.

Dahnow had evidently made a false move. Nothing renders a man more obstinate than a doubt thrown upon the success of his endeavours.

"Do you really believe that such a rag as *that* (he threw the letter contemptuously away) would alter my resolution? I will follow her to the North Pole if it is necessary. I know she loves me, and no one shall separate us."

Dahnow had rather a wish to advise the North Pole, as a good place for cooling down, but his words had, until then, been crowned by such ill-success that he thought it wiser to hold his peace. Degenthal continued:—

"I have already done all I could to find out where she is. I have heard nothing, except that she left yesterday morning. Oh! how I wish I had not promised Nora not to do anything against her father's will! I have already been

to the post and to the telegraph office; I thought it just possible that the director would have given his address there: but I was unable to ascertain anything. Now I shall go and inquire at the railway station. Karsten is so well-known that they are sure to have noticed his departure."

"You have been extremely active—at so early an hour too!" muttered Dahnow with a sigh given to his disturbed slumbers.

Degenthal did not notice the interruption. "I have also received another piece of news, which has been the principal cause of my troubling you so early. You can do me a great favour," he continued. "My mother has written, announcing her intention of coming here; I did not quite make out when. My thoughts are too much distracted to notice anything. As I must be off I cannot receive her; will you be so good as to meet her at the station? There! Read her letter, so that you may know when she comes; I can't bother myself about it."

Dahnow resignedly read this third epistle:—

"Your mother will not stay here; she is only on her way to Brussels, where she intends to fetch your cousin from the convent. She hopes, however, that you will meet her at the station, and will accompany her to Brussels."

"That is quite out of the question now," Degenthal explained.

"Your mother will be painfully surprised if you refuse doing her so small a service."

"Oh no!" said Degenthal. "She will have received my letter, and will know the reason which prevents my meeting her."

"I question her having already received your letter;" and inwardly he thought that the countess had certainly received his, and had considered a short journey advisable

for her son. "According to the date of her letter, it is very probable that she has not received yours. Anyhow, you are enough in need of your mother's indulgence not to make her needlessly angry. At one time I deplored your complete dependence upon her, and now I deplore your want of regard for her feelings. However, I told you how it would be at the time."

These words were at last listened to. Degenthal felt that his friend had knocked the nail on the head. He muttered something about the greatest interest he must have just at present, but Dahnow pursued his success.

"It is clearly indifferent whether you begin your researches a day sooner or later. The director is not a man who can disappear without leaving any trace behind him; don't, therefore, lose sight of the first thing you must have in view—to keep your mother in good humour. During the journey, too, you might find a good opportunity for speaking confidentially with her."

"I will think over it," said Degenthal, who did not choose to give in at once. "Anyhow, you go to the station; if I can, I will join you there. I do believe your intentions are good towards me."

"Heavens!" thought Dahnow, after Degenthal had at last taken his departure. "If he only knew!" He then scolded his servant, and made several ablutions in cold water, in order to regain his equanimity, and then, enveloped in a Turkish dressing-gown, and with a fez upon his head, he proceeded to sip his coffee, ensconced in a comfortable arm-chair. But when Dame Fate is against us, all the gods of the Olympus cannot help us. The hot coffee was exhaling its perfume, the smoke was beginning to form little white clouds from his cigar, his morning paper lay still unopened on the table, when again a visitor claimed admittance, and was not easier to send away than the former one had been. Dahnow stared in blank sur-

prise at the new-comer, and nervously seized hold of the Mahommedan covering to his head. The visitor was evidently a priest, tall and middle-aged, and clothed in a long black coat, with a Roman collar round his neck.

"Chaplain L., Count Degenthal's former tutor," said the stranger. "You have probably heard my name mentioned by Count Curt, who has also told me that you were his greatest friend, Baron Dahnow."

At these words, Dahnow's face cleared up; he had, indeed, heard too much about this respectable and good man not to welcome him heartily.

"You will easily guess the reason which brings me here, Baron Dahnow," said the priest, coming at once to the point. Here, Dahnow's brow became once more clouded. "First of all, the countess has made me the bearer of her warm thanks for the service you have rendered both herself and her son by the letter you wrote to her."

"Poor boy! He would not be very grateful to me if he knew about it," said Dahnow dolefully. "I doubt whether it be good to mix one's self up in other people's affairs; one often succeeds in making them unhappy," he added irritably.

"How do matters stand?" asked the priest, without entering into the pros and cons of this reflection.

"Very badly—or very well; as one may take them;" and Dahnow then recounted all that had happened. "Of course, he does not as yet even think of giving her up. If the countess supposes she can talk her son over to her ideas, she is greatly mistaken; indeed, a good deal of talking will only make matters worse, I can tell you."

"Do you consider it an intrigue of the family? A plot to catch the young count? What is your opinion of the young lady?" asked the chaplain, as if to make himself master of the case.

"She need not stoop to intrigue; with such eyes as hers

she need not try to 'catch' any one," answered Dahnow, always in the same irritable tone. "I can tell you one thing, sir, which is, that if I could call that girl's love mine, I would not give it up; no, not for the whole world. She is the sort of girl any man would dream of as his ideal. But, I beg pardon, that is not much in your line," added Dahnow with a smile, suddenly remembering that he was talking to a stranger. And when Dahnow smiled, his face was very pleasant to look at.

"Even as a child she was very handsome and singularly well-gifted," continued the priest, following his own train of thought. "I took a great interest in her, on account of her poor mother, and should be very sorry if the education we caused her to receive had only made her fit to lead an intrigue cleverly, as the countess says."

"Who talks of an intrigue?" exclaimed Dahnow. "Why, on earth, can women never take a thing simply and naturally? According to them, there must always be some deeply-designed plot, and the Lord knows what besides! Can there be anything more natural than that a man should fall in love with a handsome, agreeable, and well-brought up girl, and she with him? Were it not on account of the father's position, I could only wish Curt joy. I can quite understand its being unpleasant to his mother, but I will not move a step further in it, I tell you."

The chaplain looked attentively at the young man, and he seemed to have his own ideas on the subject, as Dahnow now turned away, and, his hands ensconced in the large pockets of his dressing-gown, stood musingly by the window.

"I think, considering how matters now stand, we had better do nothing. The father has himself broken off with Curt. It will be better to let the matter rest. The countess hopes that her son will not only accompany her

to Brussels, but will go home with her. Amongst other scenes and other people it is to be hoped that his passions will cool down and that his heartache will be cured."

"Do you really think so?" said Dahnow, turning almost angrily upon him. "You must have an uncommonly small idea of love, taking the thing so lightly."

"You have just said that it was not in my line," smiled the chaplain quietly. "However, I have, thank Heaven, a few examples to offer in support of my theory. It would be dreadful if each impression of one's youth were indelible. And you yourself, Baron Dahnow, said something of the kind in your letter."

The baron stroked his beard uneasily; he had been caught in his own net.

"The countess arrived yesterday at Coblentz by the evening train," continued the chaplain, anxious to leave his host no time in which to feel awkward. "She sent me on here by the morning train, in order that I might discuss the matter with you. I must make my excuses for having disturbed you at so early an hour. The countess wished, however, an answer before twelve o'clock, and now I shall be able to give her some soothing news. She proposes continuing her journey to-day, and hopes to meet her son at the station."

"Don't be too sure of that," said Dahnow; "for although he wishes to do it, he is in a state of mind which makes him capable of anything. You have, however, just brought such flagrant inconsequence home to me, that I must show you that I can also be consequent at times. A morning train caught immediately after an evening one does not leave us much time to satisfy the cravings of our stomach. I am sure you have breakfasted *sur le pouce:* may not I offer you something to make up for it?"

The chaplain was convinced by this piece of logic, and accepted the breakfast. The young man's invitation did

not seem quite natural to him—but then, it was not in his line.

Dahnow, meanwhile, who was proud in the possession of a good cellar, soon had an excellent breakfast conjured up by his servant.

"Well, then, to our campaign—*contre l'amour!*" said Dahnow, filling a glass of sherry and handing it to the chaplain. "Were I not such a heretic, I would envy you for your state, which makes you so calm and unconcerned in these matters."

"But I had rather not drink to the campaign, for all that," replied the chaplain. "God knows, that if it were possible otherwise, I should far prefer that such happiness should not be destroyed. I am of your opinion that it is not always good to mix one's self up in other people's business. What has happened will be one stumbling-block more in this young lady's path, which all along was no easy one. May God's will be done! Who knows for what secret reason this sorrow has been sent her?"

"You are very pious, sir," said Baron Dahnow. "Bah! women easily forget, especially handsome ones, for they soon find a comforter. We two have the ugliest part of the affair—all pain and no pleasure."

In the afternoon Dahnow found himself, at the hour named by the chaplain, waiting for the countess at the station. As the train came puffing in, Degenthal also appeared on the platform. He was in travelling attire, but only carried a bag with him.

"I shall accompany my mother, but will come back the day after to-morrow. I hope I shall find you here," he said to Dahnow.

The bell rang, a short introduction, a friendly nod from the countess, and the train carried off Degenthal with his mother.

"The day after to-morrow, without fail," cried Curt once

more to his friend from the window of the *coupé*, as if he wished thus to inform his mother also of his intention.

"A determined face that of the mother! It's not good to row in the same boat with her," Dahnow thought to himself on his way back to the town. "The best thing would be if the cousin were as lovely as a cherub. An enthusiast is capable of anything, although he has shown more determination than I gave him credit for. Poor Nora! But the chaplain is right; it would be dreadful if each impression of one's youth were indelible." And Baron Dahnow heaved a deep sigh.

"I have given him up into his mother's hands, and I will do no more in the matter," he added, at least for the twentieth time.

CHAPTER VIII.

THOSE words summed up the wishes of Countess Degenthal. Like all women who once have the management of an affair, she attributed every mishap befalling the same to the fact of having, if only for a moment, allowed the reins to slip out of her hands. It was because the chaplain wished Curt should learn to be more independent that she had sent him to the university. She had been against the step, but had, notwithstanding, allowed it to be taken; and she was comforted to think that this distressing love affair had been the result of an opposition to her will. Her nature was one which built everything upon set principles, and, as we have before stated, a stern feeling of duty had been the guide of her life. To active, and particularly to feminine, natures, there is some danger in the amount of things they include in their conception of duty, and in the extent they bring their notions to bear upon the fate of other people. Unless the heart asserts itself in a soothing manner, there is but one step from that stern spirit to the love of domineering.

The countess, left a widow at an early age, had given herself up with great energy and devotion to the fulfilment of her maternal duties, as well as to the direction of her sons' affairs. All the tenderness she was capable of was

completely dedicated to her elder son, in whose gentle nature she found all the qualities which were missing in herself. She had thus become absolute mistress of his feelings, forgetting, as many a mother does, that the day might arrive when a total revulsion would take place, and his heart would be as entirely given up into other hands as it had been in hers.

She had brought up her son according to her principles, with strong and powerful views, which, however, in his nature, had taken a more ideal turn. That he should thus forget his principles at the very first start into the world made him fall very low in her opinion. With motherly vanity she refused to seek the cause of this in her son, but rather in dangerous influences and low intrigues, joined to the excessive freedom of student life. She thought him safe as soon as she once more felt him given up, as we said, into her hands. She thought the battle half won in the very fact that he was now sitting beside her.

Dahnow had erred in supposing that she had not received Curt's letter before her departure, but she had considered it as the very height of folly, to which even the slightest attention was not to be paid. It was her principle to take active measures at once, and so it was that, according to Dahnow's advice, she had determined to secure her son without delay, and to keep him at home. The pretext for her journey was easily found in the necessity of fetching her niece from the convent. Her secret hope was that home would be made attractive to him by the presence of a young girl, and that she would also then have a good reason for spending a winter in town, and thus offer him amusement. Her fertile brain could take in all the details of a plan, and carry it out to its completion.

But she was clever enough to know that there are times when silence is the best of weapons. Not one word alluding to the affair fell from her lips during that long

journey. Her joy at his accompanying her had made her welcome warmer than it would otherwise have been; and Curt, not knowing whether she had received his letter, was also silent upon the subject. She explained to him in detail the business which would require his presence at home, and managed to awaken a little interest in him on the subject, and to bring him out of his sullen reserve. Although she considered the father's refusal to be a mere calculation, she was determined to make use of it. For the present, her main object was not to let Curt out of her sight; she had a vague feeling that he might escape her at any moment. The next day her first request was that he should accompany her to the convent, whence she intended to take Lily, who had never got over her home-sickness.

Curt did not feel any great inclination to go; but what was a small inconvenience at such a moment compared to the one great sorrow gnawing at his soul? He had only one idea; and that was how he could get at Nora, and prove to her father and to herself that he would consider no obstacle insurmountable, in order to possess her. He was not yet quite sure of his plan of attack; indeed, the thought of returning home had crossed his mind; the university town would be odious to him now, and he could carry out his researches as well from one place as from another. Anyhow, the whereabouts of Nora's father could not long remain a secret to him.

In order, therefore, to avoid any useless bickering, he accompanied his mother to the convent. There, the countess pressed him to come in, as the Mother Superior was a friend of her childhood, as well as a relation; she would like, she said, to introduce her son to her. Curt, in a complete state of moral indifference as to what became of him, once more gave way. They traversed the old-fashioned court and entered the building. The nun who received them, led them into the "parlour," and went to

call the reverend mother. The countess sat down upon one of the small horsehair sofas, whilst Curt stared absently at the pictures which adorned the walls of the otherwise plain little reception-room. Both mother and son had their hearts too full to enter upon any indifferent conversation.

The nun soon came back, and announced that the mother-superior would be down directly. She was just going to leave the room, when a low voice asked her where the Mother Superior was.

"No, don't go upstairs, miss," answered the nun, "Mother Superior will be here in a moment. You would miss her by going upstairs. Please wait in the parlour."

"I have only a few words to say," answered the speaker, and the rustle of a gown was heard. "But there are visitors here already," she said, looking into the room, and standing at the door.

Curt had started at the first sound of the voice, but now he turned hastily round. For a moment each one stood as if nailed to their place; but then, he sprang to her side.

"Nora, Nora, why are you here? You have no right to be here! They shan't bury you alive!" he cried in wild despair. "I shall bring every law of human justice to bear against so flagrant treachery. You are mine, you know you told me so yourself!"

The countess looked on, horror-struck, and was speechless. Before her, in the doorway, was a beautiful girl whose hand her son had taken possession of. She saw how the young lady made a gesture as if to beg him to leave her, and prepared to turn away from the room herself. Her strength, however, failed, and she leant back against the door, a deadly pallor overspreading her features.

Curt passed his arm around her waist, and said authoritatively to the poor nun who was watching the scene

with terror: "Go and call the Lady Superior, and bring some salts or something to restore her; you see that she is fainting. The young lady is engaged to me, so I have a right to look after her."

Saying this, he raised Nora in his arms and placed her upon the sofa, from which the countess instinctively drew back. The nun disappeared; she had never yet witnessed such a scene within the quiet convent walls; but with a true woman's heart, her sympathy was awakened for the unhappy lovers.

Curt meanwhile knelt at Nora's side. He called her by all the fondest names he could think of; he covered her hands with passionate kisses, and implored her to tell him the reason why she had left him. Her eyes soon opened again; it had only been a passing weakness caused by the suddenness of the meeting.

"Curt," she said in a soft low tone, and she looked at him with all the love her heart was full of. Suddenly, however, she sat up in terror, and pushed him away from her. She had noticed Curt's mother, and had seen the stern and almost despairing looks the countess threw upon her son.

At this juncture Curt turned. "Mother," he said, "this is Nora. Some one tried to tear her away from me; you yourself have brought me back to her. It would, perhaps, have been difficult for you to picture her to yourself such as she is; God has now allowed that you should meet her here, and that you should see how worthy she is to become your daughter. I had already written to you, telling you all, but now we can implore you *viva voce* for your blessing."

"I received your letter," said the countess coldly; "but there are species of folly which are best answered by silent contempt."

"Mother," cried Curt hotly, "then, perhaps, you are also

aware that I consider this madness as the one happiness of my whole life, and that I shall give up everything for it."

"I think we have had enough of this scene," said the countess again; "I am not fond of discussing family matters before strangers."

With these words she turned, for the Mother Superior had just entered, and was looking in mute surprise upon the excited group. As soon as Nora saw her, she arose and threw herself sobbing upon her neck.

"What is it, my child?" asked the Lady Superior gently.

Curt answered for her. "Madam, this young lady is kept back here against all sort of justice. Even if she came here of her own accord, you must not believe, you must not accept her vows. She has been talked, forced, and frightened into it; she has told me herself that her heart belongs to me; she has given me her word. Nora, you cannot, you dare not deny it!"

"Who talks of keeping any one back, of vows, or of vocation?" the Superior calmly replied. "This young lady came here because she was brought up here, and spent ten years of her life here; she only intended remaining a few days, and was to start to-morrow."

"No, Nora, you will not go away! You will not be once more faithless to me! Can your love bear with nothing? Is it too weak for a little patience?" cried the youth, mad with grief.

"Count Degenthal," said the nun gravely, "so long as this young lady is under my protection, I cannot allow you to use this language to her. I do not know whether you have any right to speak thus, nor can I judge of the reasons which keep you asunder and prevent your union. That is a question you must decide with the young lady's father, and with your family," she added, with a

look at the countess who stood near, her face distorted by anguish.

"Nora, dear," she then said, "you had better go upstairs, if you feel yourself strong enough."

Nora arose submissively. For a moment she stood irresolute, and then she turned suddenly to the countess. "Madam," she said, and her voice was pathetic and touching in the extreme, "I should never have thought that our meeting would have been so painful a one! You were so inexpressibly good to my poor dear mother—do not be hard to her daughter who will be grateful to you her whole life long. It is dreadful to be the cause of such misery!"

The countess was too much embittered and excited to understand a syllable of what Nora said.

"You have caught him so completely in your nets," she answered coldly, "that it does not much matter what his mother's feelings are the while."

Nora drew herself up. "It was he who sought me out, and we have met to-day without any wish of mine. He is perfectly free!" she said coldly and calmly, and there was something in that tone which made the countess look up in spite of herself. She was, *nolens volens*, impressed by the tall and graceful figure which turned proudly and gravely away. That moment was the only one in which Countess Degenthal ever understood her son's passion.

"Mother!" cried the latter wildly. "Beware of treading too harshly upon our life's happiness. I can implore you, but I shall also know how to act. Nora, say one word to me!" and he tried to rush after her.

The Superior stepped forward, and stood between him and the door. "Speak with the young lady's father, or else visit her at his lodgings; here I cannot allow you to say one word more. As far as I know, Mr. Karsten is living, for the present, at the P. Hotel."

Curt looked up at the nun's sweet face, and it seemed to

him as if she were, perhaps, his ally. "Oh, if indeed you are to Nora all that she has told me she found in you, then tell my mother that she is worthy of her!"

"She possesses all the qualities of the mind and of the heart which would fit her for any position," said the Superior. "But, dear Count Curt, there are circumstances against which no man should try to fight; he always regrets his resistance sooner or later. It would have been better if you had not met."

"But it was Providence which brought us for the third time together in so miraculous a manner."

"We often call providential that which pleases us, and yet it is often but a trial which Providence sends us," answered the nun gently.

"I cannot remain here any longer. I must have a carriage and return to the hotel," said the countess with agitation.

The Superior was going to ring the bell, but Curt offered to go and fetch a carriage himself.

As soon as he had left the room the countess sank, as if completely broken down, upon the sofa.

"Clotilde," said the nun, calling her tenderly as she had done in the days of their youth, "Clotilde, I can fully understand and sympathise with your grief and with your bitter experience. But be at least comforted by the thought that your son has not been caught in the nets of an unworthy person. I have known her since her earliest childhood, and can only say that if her social position were different, he could not have made a better choice."

The countess made an impatient and deprecating gesture while the nun continued,

"I know how that very fact is one which opposes all your, and, indeed, all my principles; it is seldom good to bring a disproportionate element into any society. But surely there are exceptions. I cannot believe that a passion

conceived by two such natures as those of Curt and of Nora will be a mere passing thing. It is a deep and pure affection, such as takes its birth in two unspoilt hearts. The strangeness of their relative positions, too, has only strengthened this feeling; for he must also have fought long with himself before love got the upper hand. You may be sure that the gulf at first seemed as great to him as it now seems to you. So much have I ascertained from herself, for she had confided her short love tale to me. It is perhaps dangerous to shatter so deep an affection without some all-important reason. You know young hearts do not feel much inclination to bend before old principles."

"I never change *my* principles," said the countess sharply, "and still less would I do so for the sake of two lovers' folly, or for that of some low intrigue. It would not be my duty to act otherwise."

"We often consider those duties the most important which we impose on ourselves; and we cannot build up other people's happiness according to our own ideas. Clotilde, don't be too hard upon them; you might lose a son, instead of gaining a daughter."

"Don't waste a word more upon the matter," said the countess impatiently. "I never allow myself to be influenced by any one. Moreover, I don't wish Lily to hear anything about this. She is too young. In the afternoon I will ask the chaplain to come and fetch her. I feel too much overcome to do so myself. Please tell her nothing of this visit."

The Lady Superior promised to do as the countess wished, and Curt entered, saying that the carriage was there. His mother did not accept his proffered arm, but he followed her into the carriage. Mother and son sat silently side by side. Perhaps Curt had hoped she would say one soothing word; but she did not open her lips. When they arrived at the hotel he helped her to get

out; then, giving the coachman another address, he hastily re-entered the carriage, and drove away.

"Where did the count say he wished to be taken?" asked the countess of the waiter who stood by.

"To the P. Hotel," was the answer.

The countess heaved a deep sigh, for she knew what that address meant.

CHAPTER IX.

AFTER the painful scene which had taken place in the morning, Nora had returned to the room which had been assigned to her—her own old room, which the nun knew she would prefer to any other. Thus she once more sat in that quiet retreat from which she had so often longed to be free, to go out into the wide and agitated world; and now, indeed, there was a great strife being carried on in her breast.

So much had crowded itself together into a short space of time. Since the days when she inhabited that room, she had realised the greatest of all happinesses, the greatest of all miseries, which can befall a young heart. These feelings were struggling within her, and pride—offended pride—was also asserting itself.

One thought, however, was uppermost: "We have met again, and he loves me, and I know that he cares more for me than for anything else in this world."

Amidst a shower of tears, her face was ever and anon lighted up by a bright and radiant smile, and then she hid her face in her hands and shut her eyes, as if she were shy of looking at this wondrous and beautiful secret.

As she sat there and thought, she remembered all the events of that memorable day—it was hardly a fortnight

ago, when, standing at the bow-window, they had mutually confessed their love. She had smiled, too, at the mistake he had made in fancying that she had chosen to become a nun. The truth, hidden for months in their inmost hearts, had slipped out so unconsciously, and they had told each other how love had been too strong, and that they had both striven vainly against it. Such a moment is worth a whole life! Certainly they had not ignored the difficulties which stood in the way of their happiness; but these had seemed so small, so easily to be got over! He was his own master, and had only a mother's heart to win for himself and for his Nora; and then the fact is, that when human beings are intensely happy, they feel a great deal and think very little.

But another picture arose before Nora's eyes—her father's return! her father, who knew all before she could tell her own tale. He had been extremely displeased, and had treated the whole thing as a childish folly. How differently the same matter may be looked upon by different people! Her father's objections were the very things she had talked over with Curt; but oh! what monstrous proportions the difficulties had assumed! how immeasurable the abyss which divided them had now become! how threatening the anger of Curt's family, and how complete the destruction of his life's happiness!

Her father had concluded with these dreadful words: "They will think that we have caught him by unworthy means. They will say that you used your beauty as a snare in which to beguile his youth and inexperience, through which to gain a name and a position for yourself. They will say that we were low enough to make undue profit out of a moment of youthful giddiness."

Nora had given way to this; her pure and simple mind trembled for her father's reputation. "Write to him that it was a mistake, and that we must part." She herself had

added the words we know of with a steady hand. She then besought her father to leave the villa at once. "Here I feel myself treading on burning coals," she said. "Let me never meet him again. Send me far, far away from here, to my mother's land across the seas, so that they may not think I have tried to catch him."

Her father's heart had been moved by the poor child's grief; all the more so that he reproached himself for having allowed matters to come to such a point. He also had thought it better for Nora to leave the Rhineland as soon as possible, and had proposed a visit to her former school, where a decision of some kind might be arrived at. Nora had joyfully agreed to this; it seemed, indeed, a boon to her suffering heart to pour itself out to her old friend, and to claim from her both comfort and advice. Thus it came to pass that the director and his daughter had started that very night, whilst his wife remained at the villa in order to arrange all for breaking up the establishment.

The Superior had received her darling with open arms. Her fond heart grieved to find her exposed so soon to one of the sorrows she had feared for her. She approved of Nora's idea of visiting her relations in the far west; but the director would not hear of such a long separation. Had Curt's visit taken place a few days later, he would probably not have met her.

And now that Nora thought all these things over, she began to see them in another light. She had been ready to sacrifice all her happiness to his; but that word he had spoken in the morning came back to her with renewed force: "Can your love bear with nothing? Is it too weak for a little patience?" Yes! what she had called by the name of sacrifice, seemed now only weakness and want of purpose. She had allowed her pride to take at once the upper hand. After all, her father had made no other objections than those which she and Curt were pre-

pared for. She had given way at once, whilst Curt had so nobly kept up and fought for his love. Would it really be for his happiness if she left him now? What a depth of misery his eyes revealed! Would *she* not give up everything for him? Then why had she not thought him capable of doing the same for her? In her anguish she cried: "Oh! what shall I do? Shall I renounce our love and fly from him, or shall I fight the battle to the end?"

Who can tell what decision Nora would have come to, had no fresh obstacle arisen in her path. The sun was already gilding the heavens with its glorious evening tints, as on that day when Nora had been summoned before the mother-superior. As on that day, the distant mountain-tops were dipped in roseate hues, and Nora sat on, motionless and wrapt in thought. At last a knock was heard at the door—indeed there had been more than one knock since the morning announcing her meals to her, but she had given a headache as a plea for remaining in her room. The superior, she knew, could only come to her in the evening. This time it was a letter which had been sent to her. She took it with a beating heart, and a thousand suppositions flashed across her mind. The handwriting was a strange one to her, but the envelope bore the coronet of a count. She guessed at once that the missive must come from Curt's mother; and so it did. The countess was one of those women to whom sorrow is only rendered bearable by immediate action.

Sitting alone in the comfortless room of her hotel, the mother, knowing whither her son had directed his steps, was on the brink of despair. Less than any one else could she patiently sit down under contradiction and suffer her plans to be crossed. Circumstances had given her an independence to which she had accustomed herself, and of which she had always made a wise and temperate

use. Now, again, she was convinced of the good sense of her opinions. "Something must be done," were always the first words which rose to her lips, and in this case she added: "What is to be done?" She knew that her son would listen to no advice for the present. Her friend's description of Nora had made her think more highly of her. "Well, if she really is so noble-minded, so well brought up, so incapable of any intrigue, she cannot wish to force herself upon a family which does not want her. If it were really true that she had wished to avoid him, she could say aloud that the matter should be at an end, and she would sacrifice her love to his happiness." On the strength of this reasoning, the countess had made up her mind to write to Nora, and to appeal to her heart, to her understanding, and last, not least, to her pride.

Nora read the letter, her cheeks burning with indignation.

"Do not rob me of my son," the countess concluded, after alleging all the reasons against the marriage. "Do not step between mother and son and divide them. This you would do by marrying him, for he would do it in defiance of my will. You would divide us, even if I had power enough to prevent the marriage, as then he would never forgive his mother. I am told that you are noble and generous—then give up that, which, under existing circumstances, can never be conducive to his happiness. We women know so well how to make complete sacrifices. His heart will become calm once more, and he will be freed from the feeling of honour which binds him to you, when he hears from your own mouth that your love refuses to set at nought all the serious reasons which divide you. You may judge of the strength of mind and of heart I think you capable of, by my addressing this prayer to you; and both my esteem and my gratitude will be boundless should you act in so noble a way," &c., &c.

The conclusion was an able one; but even boundless esteem and gratitude fall rather short in the balance against love. It would, perhaps, have been difficult for the countess to explain the reason why she thought it so natural to wish her own heart not to be robbed, exacting all the while that another heart should rob itself of its love and happiness for her sake. Nora read the letter more than once. Perhaps, because she did not quite understand what the countess wanted, or, perhaps, because an affectionate beginning had led her to hope for something better.

But suddenly she drew herself up. She now understood what was required of her. This woman wanted her to be the murderess of her own happiness,—she wanted her to show herself fickle, weak, and untrue to her love. Her father's passionate nature seemed to awake in her at the thought.

"It would be a lie, a horrible lie," she said, "for, like him, I find nothing too difficult so long as we love each other. I know that I shall not bring disgrace upon him," she added with trembling lips. "I know we think and feel alike. I will do nothing to keep him, but I will renounce our love no longer. He shall, at all events, not say of me, that I am weak and faithless."

All her former doubts were gone; and, her cheeks still burning, she took up her pen to frame an answer.

"Your son is as free to-day as he was yesterday," she wrote firmly and proudly; "for it was my father who refused his consent; and I shall never go against his will. I shall not try to retain him either by a word or by any step of mine—indeed, I had avoided him until to-day. But I can speak no untruth, and it would be one to take back the promise he gained from me as the only means of furthering his happiness; if I were untrue to the feelings I entertain for him, and which I believe will last my life long, I will not part from him through a lie—for a lie has never

soothed a sorrow or wrought any good; but my love is strong enough to wait and to endure."

The letter was no sooner finished than Nora sealed it, and rang for it to be sent off.

Nora stood long at the window, and the words she had just written sounded in her ears, now serious and earnest, now mocking and derisive.

Had she been right to enter upon this combat? Would it have been better to accept the sacrifice which would have put an end to all struggling?

This question was gnawing at her heart, when at last her trusty friend entered the room.

Madame Sybille was tired by the day's exertions, exhausted by the morning's excitement. Her thoughts had been so long away from human passions that she found it difficult to encounter them again. But there are hearts which never become strangers to the earth and to its petty sorrows, however near heaven they may be themselves.

Madame Sybille took the burning head in her hands, and looking tenderly into the innocent, bright eyes, she listened to the tale which revealed all the storms raging within that young soul.

"Right or wrong?" she said gently. "Child, earthly love is no virtue and it is no fault: you have acted according to its dictates. You were not bound to accept the sacrifice imposed upon you. You have not asked for advice, and perhaps no one could advise you better than your own heart in the matter. But remember this, my child—it is nothing great, nothing uncommon, to suffer and to struggle for earthly love; the weakest of human creatures have done so ere this. Before God it is very insignificant, for such love is only the product of our own heart, the most beautiful of God's gifts, the most fragrant flower He has strewn upon our path. But those who

wish to enjoy its fragrancy must consent to be pricked by its thorns—the sharpest thorns that can prick a human heart. If you feel that your love is worth all the sufferings that it will bring with it—well then! . . . You might have conquered it by this one sacrifice, and who knows whether you will not have to retain it by a thousand sacrifices more painful. But true and pure love makes up for a great deal. Perhaps God has placed it in your heart to protect you from other dangers," she added, placing her hand upon the youthful head, as if with a blessing. "For the second time you have chosen strife instead of peace. . . . May the Lord guide you, my child!"

CHAPTER X.

THE countess smiled when she had read Nora's letter. "I thought so," she said somewhat complacently to herself; and once more she was convinced that the mistake about Nora's character had not been made by her: she had written to Nora under the influence of the nun's words. She also had remained alone many a dreary hour that day; Curt had not returned till late, and the chaplain had gone to fetch Lily, and to show her some of the curiosities of the town; for after all that had happened the countess did not feel up to the task of amusing the girl. She had, however, turned these hours of solitude to account, by endeavouring to take in clearly how matters stood. Before even the answer to her letter—a measure *in extremis*—had come, she had determined upon what line of conduct she would pursue. She would apparently consent, but would insist upon certain conditions. That would be wiser than to lose all influence over her son by pushing things too far.

"Children must be left their toy, or else they get obstinate in longing after it." That was about the sum of her reflections; and then, her mind being made up, she frowned no longer, but employed herself busily in jotting down notes upon a stray piece of paper.

At dinner-time the chaplain and Lily put in an appearance. The countess looked scrutinisingly at the young girl who had not developed herself to advantage, since she had last seen her. Lily's stature was small, her features were indifferent, and her youth was of too exuberant a nature to be attractive. Now, with her swollen eyes and her overpowering shyness, she looked particularly unprepossessing. Countess Degenthal turned away with irritation; here was another spoke in her wheel. How on earth could that pretty child's face have grown into anything so plain? Unwittingly, Nora's tall and fine figure and her expressive eyes arose before the countess in painful contrast. She heaved a deep sigh and returned to her notes until dinner was announced, and Curt came in. He looked tired, but on the whole more gentle and quiet than during the earlier part of the day. His mother received him coldly, although he kissed her hand with some emotion. During dinner, the conversation was painfully monosyllabic, and Curt more than once sought to attract the countess's attention, but in vain. He seemed anxious to speak with her, but she had evidently decided upon another course. As soon as dinner was over, she arose, and went to her room, asking only the chaplain to visit her there. Curt's brow darkened once more, and the gentler expression vanished from his eyes. He stood uncertain for a while, as if intending to follow his mother after all, but then, changing his mind, he retired, after wishing his cousin a hasty good-night.

Poor little Lily! This was a sad beginning to her life out of the convent! She had so rejoiced at meeting her cousin, and now he had hardly said a word to her, hardly considered her worthy of a look. Evidently something had happened between mother and son, and that was the cause of Curt's ill-humour. So much she perceived, and with the party spirit which one young creature feels for

another, she immediately settled in her own mind, that her aunt was in the wrong.

On the following day, a fiacre stopped at the door of the P. Hotel, and Chaplain L. got out of it. He asked for Director Karsten, and was at once ushered into his presence. The director was at his writing-desk, but as soon as the visitor entered, he sprang up, and cordially held out his hand to him.

"Years seem to have rolled unconsciously over your head, leaving no trace behind them," said the circus-rider to the priest.

It was true; the peace of his mind and the tranquillity of his conscience made him look younger than his age, whilst years ago, the gravity of his vocation had made him look older than he really was.

The two men shook each other warmly by the hand.

"Are you come as an ambassador?" Karsten asked with a smile. "Yesterday's unfortunate meeting has reopened an affair which I had hoped to nip off in the bud. Pray tell the countess that this engagement is against my wishes, and that she cannot deplore the whole thing more than I do myself. I ought to have been more prudent. It was natural, considering the education Nora had received, that there should arise a community of tastes between them. She will always feel herself attracted towards that set," he added with a darkening brow; "but I thought the gulf which divided them too great for them to dream of such a thing—particularly as I knew how seriously the young count had been brought up, and how severe his principles were."

"I have come as a mediator," said the chaplain. "Did Count Curt call upon you yesterday?"

"Yes, he came more than once, for he did not find me at home at his first visit. He renewed his proposal, and I my answer. The youth defended his cause earnestly

and warmly. I believe in the sincerity of his intentions, and in the depth of his love, as well as in that of my child's affection for him. It is hard to refuse such a lot for her. She is like her poor mother and knows *how* to love; she will be utterly miserable, . . . and she is my only child." Then looking straight at the chaplain, he added, "Pride plays strange tricks sometimes; but you, as a priest, say, of course, that one must learn to bend to it. I repeat it, she is my only child, and Heaven knows what else I can do to make her happy. Do you think that the countess would be open to any proposals of mediation?"

"I came myself with offers of the kind. The countess also thought it better not to go against the stream. I am commissioned to ask you whether your daughter would accept the conditions to which the countess has attached her consent."

"Well!" said the director, throwing himself upon a chair; "Speak! Here were mine," he observed, laying his hand upon a sheet of paper he had been writing on.

"If the pair remain faithful to each other during the lapse of two years, the countess will no longer refuse her consent to the marriage. She wishes, however, that during those two years they should not meet, nor entertain any sort of correspondence. The matter is, moreover, to remain a dead secret to every one, until the expiration of that time. If these conditions are faithfully observed, the countess will also keep her word, and will receive Miss Nora as her daughter-in-law. But should these her wishes be set at naught, she would likewise consider herself no longer bound in any way."

The director listened with profound attention, twisting his beard the while.

"The countess reckons upon the mutability of human

nature and upon time," he said at last. "Perhaps I do the same if I accept these conditions. . . . Well, then! Let it be so! The young people must consent to the trial; after all, it is not too much for so unusual a choice. But tell the countess I perfectly understand her hope and intention, and that I fully share both."

Then suddenly he arose, and began pacing the room restlessly up and down, as was his wont. "But I will also make matters easier for my daughter," he said after a short pause. "I will raise one of the difficulties which exist, although the countess does not mention it. I know the position in which the young count is, and what advantages he loses if he does not marry his cousin. These advantages, at all events, can be replaced by my daughter. Tell the countess that Nora was not in such need as to be obliged to "set her cap" at a count. There are many others who would probably be glad to obtain her. That is her dowry," and he pointed to the sheet of paper he had just been writing upon.

Astonished at the sum, the chaplain started back, and the director looked with a smile of satisfaction at his almost upset countenance.

"The despised business was not so very bad after all," he said satirically. "It has made my wife's fortune four times as considerable as it was, and the half belongs to Nora. The countess can easily make inquiries, as I have deposited the sum at my bankers. I am, moreover, at her disposal for any other inquiry she may like to make. But please add one thing more, for I know that golden bridges alone do not suffice. Say that my daughter has the right to bear another name than the one I now am, perhaps, too well known by. She might take that of her grandfather, a good old French name. She will then be completely detached from me," he added, his voice trembling a little. "But her mother broke with everything for my sake, and

I will be resigned if the child gives me up for her own happiness."

The sorrowful intonation with which he spoke these last words reminded the chaplain forcibly of the days of their first acquaintance. He took both Karsten's hands in his.

"You do a great deal to smooth the road," he said, "and the countess, as well as Count Curt, will, I am sure, fully appreciate your conduct."

"It is not enough," Karsten answered, shaking his head; "and indeed no wonder, considering the light my position is seen in. An individual may be harshly treated, but that does not change the existing rule. It would have been better, if at that time we had acted differently; she would then have gone my way, and not have entered into these complications."

"She would have avoided these, and have fallen into far deeper and more dangerous ones," the chaplain said gravely. "The poor mother trembled for her child's soul, not merely for her earthly happiness."

"Yes, that is the pious way of looking at the matter," said the director lightly. "We men of the world take another view of life and of its claims. One must take things as they are. At my side, Nora would be at this moment the most celebrated beauty of the day—an object with which to flatter my pride, which pride I must now drag in the dust for her sake, and yet have nothing of her by the sacrifice! Such is the way of the world!"

The chaplain did not answer this argument; he perceived that the director had gradually been drawn down to the level of those he lived with, and that the nobler nature asserted itself far less in him than before.

"And shall you not soon think of retiring from so exciting and fatiguing an occupation, of enjoying a little rest now that you have earned such a fortune?"

The director shrugged his shoulders. "A fortune! Why, my friend, the fact is that one requires a great deal now-a-days; and who knows what other duties I may not have to fulfil. I cannot begin doing nothing already. Moreover, you see how well the profession agrees with me," he added with a smile. "But now let us see about calming down our young people. The affair has already taken up much of my time, and I must be at work again."

The chaplain soon afterwards rose to take his leave. The two parted as they had met, in the most friendly way —the director displaying as usual that chivalry of manner so peculiar to him.

Notwithstanding Karsten's noble and generous conduct in the matter, the chaplain carried away with him a disagreeable impression. It seemed to him that the man was gradually on the decline. He was going morally down hill, although, perhaps, imperceptibly. But when the time should come for the elasticity of youth to forsake him, would not the fall be a sudden and a great one? "No man," said the chaplain to himself, "can completely free himself from the influence of his daily surroundings;" and he added, with a sigh, "May God soon lead that poor girl to a haven of rest!"

Curt had spent a restless night; his meeting with the countess in the evening rekindled his anger. After his conversation with the director, he had returned with the intention of begging and entreating his mother not to be hard with him, and of proving to her that he had not taken this step lightly or in a moment of blind passion. But if she preferred open hostilities, well, he was prepared to face them. A thousand plans crossed his brain; anyhow he was determined to move heaven and earth rather than be separated from Nora. He would rather do anything, and renounce his right to the inheritance than give Nora up.

He then fell into a heavy sleep which prolonged itself far into the morning hours. Sleep comes and soothes youth in its sorrow, and assists age even in its joys. When he awoke he was received by the startling news, that his mother and his cousin had left. He was told that the chaplain would explain the reason of their departure. He had, however, to wait a long time for him, which he did in no patient mood.

At last they met, and Curt was made aware of the proposed conditions. One of the most disagreeable things which can happen to us, is to have wound ourselves up to a pitch, and for the cause of such an exertion to dwindle away without any action of our own. Curt felt this acutely. That which had made him gather up all his force of will and determination, that for which he had made up his mind to suffer and to endure, was now brought to him as the toy a child has been crying for, and which one gives him, sure that he will tire of it all the sooner. But he could not, he durst not refuse what was offered him. An objection on his part would have seemed like a doubt of his constancy.

He could not quite bring himself to be very grateful and very joyful, notwithstanding his friend's kind and soothing words. He felt irritated, and in the mood of quarrelling with everything and everyone. In the evening, when he went to Karsten, in order to exchange promises with Nora, he did not hit upon a lucky moment.

In the anteroom were assembled a number of the queerest looking people possible—the scum of different sets of society —who had come to offer their services to the director.

One of these, a tall fellow, with dark locks falling artistically around his neck, was just taking leave of Mr. Karsten. Curt heard the latter assure him, "That he was delighted to be able to take him into the company."

He was handsome, but not prepossessing looking, and

he strongly betrayed a Semitic origin. As he went out he looked piercingly at Curt, suspecting a rival in him; but Curt's haughty glance, and the director's more ceremonious manner of receiving him, seemed to put the aspiring circus-rider's doubts at rest.

The director conducted Curt into another room, and said apologetically:—

"You see, Count Degenthal, I am pursued by offers even here; I had unavoidable business to transact."

Curt bowed in a friendly and courteous manner, but for the first time, he felt all the odium of having to take Nora from this set. Inwardly he made up his mind that she should not spend the two years of probation in such society.

It was well, that she soon appeared before him, and that, gazing upon her dear face, he was made to forget all the rest. Her smile dispelled his apprehensions; and the fact that she belonged to him was bliss enough to chase away every other thought.

Nora had been overcome by the rapid change which had taken place, and she hardly credited her father when he came and told her the great news.

Had her letter and her determination brought this about?

She hoped so. Or else, was it still better, and had the countess's heart been touched? She was overjoyed, and gladly accepted the conditions; nor could she understand the reason why her father and the superior had not seemed to rejoice so much as herself.

It was quite natural that conditions should be made, and what were two years? Her smiling mouth and her beaming eyes told Curt that she would gladly have waited and endured the lapse of twenty. Two years seem so short a time when life is before us!

But it was not only the blessed inexperience of youth

which made her think the trial so easy a one—it was also that she was firm and constant in her great love for him.

Curt remained three days in Brussels, three days to be gained before the trial was to commence in good earnest, before the parting from Nora, and the suspension of all intercourse with her was to begin.

In order that no suspicions should be awakened at the university, he intended to return there for a short time, and then to allege the management of his property as the reason of his leaving. The tender chord in his heart made him long to be at his mother's side, to regain his place in her affections, and to pave the way for his bride.

As for Nora, he would gladly have found some means of keeping her away from her father's associates during the time of trial; but her filial love for the director made this out of the question. The director, moreover, had proposed an arrangement which met Curt's wishes half way. He had long since entertained the idea of having a fixed home, and this idea was strengthened by the fact that his wife expected to become a mother during the course of the ensuing year. He proposed, therefore, to buy a villa in the neighbourhood of some great town, where Nora would establish herself with her step-mother, and would have a lady companion who would remain with her when Mrs. Karsten should be absent with her husband. This proposal suited every one, so that the parting was less bitter than it otherwise would have been.

CHAPTER XI.

A FEW months after these events had taken place, the countess established herself in town. It was the first time, since her widowhood, that she had come out of her seclusion. The world might have been satisfied as to her reasons for doing so: she wished to introduce Lily into society, and her son intended to enter the diplomatic career. But somehow the world—that is to say her world, the fashionable set in which she lived—was not satisfied, and gave itself the pleasure of being surprised at such a course.

The world considered Lily very young to "come out," and the world also thought it extraordinary that a man like Count Degenthal, master of a fortune, and having property of his own, should enter into the service of the State. Some friends of the countess supposed that it was a clever stroke of her's, in order to retain the management of the property a little longer in her own "hands;" others supposed that the young count wanted to be free from his mother's dominion. As usual, the world was both right and wrong. Had matters followed their natural course, the countess would not have brought Lily out at seventeen; she would have imposed at least one more year of quiet country life upon her. She would certainly

not have been anxious either that her son should enter any career, but would have considered it advisable to place him at once at the head of his own affairs, in order to keep him at home. She was forced to change her projects, for it was not her intention to let matters take their course, however satisfactory the director's offers had been. She saw that she could no longer abuse his conduct, and was rather irritated than not that it should be so. Should the worst come to the worst, the brilliant promises of the director would certainly gild the pill,—but until the marriage was irrevocable, the countess considered it her duty to do all she could to prevent it.

She did not think a quiet country life fitted to turn her son's thoughts into another channel, especially as Lily had not the charm which could fascinate, nor the vivacity which could attract him. She therefore determined to try what the world and a new kind of occupation might do for him, and against his love. She also thought that his blind passion for Nora was mostly owing to his total inexperience and ignorance of the world, and she was sure that in the world he would more easily forget her. She had therefore proposed that he should enter the diplomatic career, which necessitated his going to town, at least for some time. She then decided she would bring Lily out, in order not to lose sight of her son.

The proposal suited Curt; with his name and position he was sure to get on easily in the career, and it was one which would give him new impressions, and enlarge the circle of his ideas. It was difficult for him to live with his mother, having this secret difference in their hearts to which she, for one, never alluded; and the small society of their country neighbours was oppressively humdrum and tiresome. He liked the notion of entering upon a larger field for his mental activity, of making new acquaintances, and of visiting new countries.

His mother's house was soon one of the most frequented in town. Lily's reputation of being an heiress, as well as the supposition that Curt would soon be his own master, added to the glitter of a great name, and of a well-kept establishment. It was known that the countess earnestly desired a marriage should take place between the two young people, but that did not prevent enterprising mothers and sons making their own little plans, especially as the parties concerned gave no reason by their conduct for coupling their names together. Curt was decidedly indifferent to his cousin. He was always to be seen of an evening in his mother's drawing-room, but the rest of the day he spent mostly alone. His studies apparently took up his thoughts as well as his time, and the young ladies were one and all indignant at his amiable indifference towards them. Not one of them could boast of his having taken particular notice of her.

The countess was probably put out by his conduct; she had thought her stratagem would be followed by more rapid victory. Towards the end of Carnival she gave a great ball, at which the whole town, as it is termed, was assembled. Curt did the honours with his usual ease and amiability, as well as with that perfect tranquillity and self-possession which can only exist when there is no "attraction" for us in the world.

"What a charming, well-bred youth your son is," said an old gentleman to the countess, sitting at the entrance of the ball-room amidst a circle of chaperones. He was a great authority in worldly matters, this worthy old Excellency. "He really has the very perfection of *bon ton*, and is so clever and handsome into the bargain. Quite the son to rejoice a mother's heart!"

The countess bowed her thanks to the compliment, but a contraction of her features plainly showed that she was not quite satisfied with her son.

The old Excellency noticed this at once. He was a knowing and worldly excellency, and liked to get at the bottom of all things.

"I cannot say how I have always admired his conduct. I have seldom seen so steady a young man. Indeed, he has kept so much aloof from all the pleasures of our town-life, that one might almost be anxious for the future. For, alas! dear countess, is it not a fact that we must all sow our wild oats?"

"If, indeed, that is a necessity, I suppose my son will not be exempt from the general rule;" the countess said this so bitterly, that one could gather she already spoke from experience.

This awakened the old Excellency's curiosity to the highest pitch. What reason could the countess have to blame her son, about whom even the greatest scandal-mongers were silent? "Perhaps he refuses to do as mamma bids him, and marry that little golden bird out there," he thought, following Curt with his eyes, and seeing him turn abruptly away from Lily, who had gone up to him, as if to ask him something.

"Your son will soon leave us, I have heard," he began, making a fresh attack upon the countess. "The young ladies will wear mourning, although he treats them with complete indifference. Not one of our beauties can boast of having made a conquest of him."

"He is too young to settle down as yet," said the countess coldly. "But you, who are always so well-informed, can surely tell me where he is to be sent?"

This time she was evidently anxious as to the answer she would receive.

"Diplomatic secrets!" smiled the old gentleman. "Moreover, I do not like to spoil the evening of so amiable an hostess. Mothers do not relish great distances to be placed between themselves and their sons."

"Oh, pray, speak!" said the countess with ill-suppressed impatience. "Will he be sent to North Germany?"

"Precisely in an opposite direction, but somewhat further away, countess; nor more nor less than to his Ottoman Majesty. But when charming ladies wish a thing not to happen . . . you know, countess—*ce que femme veut, Dieu le veut*," he added in a whisper. "Our *attachés* are not so very important that a change on their parts should upset the balance of the State."

"Oh, why?" said the countess quickly. "It is quite well as it is. We mothers must not wish to keep our sons tied to our petticoats. Moreover," she explained, "Baron X., the present ambassador there, is an old acquaintance of our family. But your Excellency is always so well-informed," she added with a smile, "I don't know where you have not your threads. You are really a very dangerous man!"

"The old Excellency smiled, for although he was only an ex-minister, he liked to pass for a man who possessed great influence. As the countess now rose to greet a new arrival, he muttered to himself: "Quite a Semiramis! But I should like to know the reason why she wants her son to be sent so far away. One really might imagine that he had grown too quickly to please her. Oh, women! women! who could ever guess at all what their sweetness and gentleness conceals! For instance, who knows what that shy little mouse will grow into?" he added, alluding to Lily, who was now standing not far from him, always fresh and rosy, but always awkward and shy. She was a favourite with old gentlemen, who liked her rosiness, childishness, and the shyness of her manner; whilst young men declared her tiresome and insignificant. True, she had a few admirers of her fortune—pattern young men who followed the wise advice of their mothers. With these apologies for lovers she was equally silent and pas-

sive; and reddened and smiled exactly in the same manner to each one.

People gifted with a fine spirit of observation, declared that she always followed her handsome cousin with her eyes, although he openly avoided her. Just now he had turned almost rudely away from her, in order to greet with unusual warmth his old friend Dahnow who, passing through town, had not been able to refuse Countess Degenthal's pressing invitation.

"I can't say that you're very civil to your cousin," said Dahnow in a tone of reproach, as Degenthal led him away into another room. "You were in the middle of a dance."

"Ah, bosh! One need not be so civil with relations! Why did she choose me? But now, tell me.—What on earth can have brought you here at the very end of Carnival?"

"Oh, just the wish of making a little tour before throwing myself headlong into reading up for the examination. I tell you your cousin can turn out to be a very pretty girl, once she has developed herself a little more. She has such a pretty line about the mouth too."

"Really?" said Curt, "do you think so? Oh, I daresay you're right; for me, she belongs to those set of people who do not exist."

"But you exist for her, anyhow. Poor thing! she quite touched me, as she stood there, following you with a sad look upon her poor little face, when you left her in the lurch."

"Oh, it's all nonsense which has been put into her head, and which she must get out of it again. Dahnow, look here at my talisman. I did not like to write to you about it, but now, see!" and Curt pulled out of his waistcoat pocket a small gold locket, containing the miniature of a lovely face.

"Oh! beautiful!" said Dahnow. "So you have remained faithful to her after all! You were so silent, and went away so suddenly, that I thought it was all over. But have you any hope of success?"

"I *have* succeeded, I may say; a few conditions have been made; quite bearable ones, too; my mother insisted upon two years' separation and complete secrecy. Did anything transpire on the Rhine about the whole thing?"

"Oh, very little! It was simply said that your mother had very sensibly called you away. As the director and his family also went away directly, the matter was soon forgotten. Students' loves are never thought very much of."

"*Nous verrons!*" said Curt drily, smoothing his moustache, and giving one more look at the miniature before closing the locket.

"Where is she now?" asked Dahnow.

"In a villa not far from X, in which she will spend the two years to come. I can't bear to think of her in contact with the company, and therefore asked her father to make that arrangement," he added in a changed tone.

Dahnow looked meditatively before him. "Do you know" . . . he began, and then, breaking off, suddenly asked: "*Apropos* what are your plans? I know you have entered the diplomatic career. Do you remain here during the first months?"

"Oh no; my studies are over, and I shall probably be sent away as attaché to some embassy or other in a few days."

"Ah!" said Dahnow, as if relieved. "And now, my good fellow, you're evidently wanted. There is a footman in the doorway looking at you with such a woful face, that you had better try to comfort him."

"Ah, yes!" said Degenthal, "I suppose it is about the supper. We shall do it without any ceremony, sitting at

small tables. You look out for yourself, old fellow. As master of the house, I must take some important personage upon myself. I will come to your table later on; take my cousin in; as it is, you don't know any one else."

"I shall know how to get on, never fear," muttered Dahnow; and, indeed, he got on very well, for a short time afterwards he was at the side of the so-called "Belle of the season," amidst a group of fashionable young men, whom he was amusing with his flow of wit and humour.

"Ah, Count Degenthal!" now exclaimed the handsome young lady, beaming upon him with her black eyes—a thing she had done without success during the whole winter, and she had not yet quite given up all hope of attaching him to her triumphal car. "Count Degenthal, tell us why your North German friend only visits our town now, when our festivities are at an end, and when we are going to cover our heads with ashes."

"Because, as I have already observed, I am only a poor heretic, and know nothing about covering my head with ashes. But I have the worst of all penances to bear, for I know not what I have lost, unless you compensate me by giving me a turn to-night."

"Flatterer!" said Degenthal laughing. "Countess Hedwig, punish him by giving him a great many rounds; for he is like a Turk who prefers looking on when others dance, to dancing himself."

"Ah! then I can guess what has brought you here, Baron Dahnow," said another gentleman. "North Germany has sent us a few artists of the kind, or rather of the jumping and springing kind. The famous Karsten Circus has arrived, and will help to shorten Lent a little."

Dahnow so completely engrossed the attention, that no one noticed Degenthal's sudden change of expression.

"Baron, how you blush!" cried Miss Hedwig laughing. "So those quadrupeds seem to have more attractions for

you than anything or any one else. Now, see, I declare you're blushing again!"

It was strange, but Dahnow did not somehow find as usual a ready answer to the young lady's saucy speech.

Degenthal, standing opposite to him, looked at him with surprise. "Did you know that the Karsten Circus was coming here?" he said in a somewhat forced tone.

"Why, my dear Degenthal," answered Dahnow with a laugh, "you seem to think very little of the attractions of your town, to notice so trifling an event. Karsten was, moreover, not in B. this year, but further up north."

"And, therefore, you have come here in order to find —— well, not him, I suppose, here!" said one of the gentlemen. "*Chi sa* whether it is on account of the quadrupeds! I have heard that Karsten has a daughter who has created an immense sensation everywhere. Last autumn, one talked of nothing else on the Rhine. I hope she will also show herself off to us!"

"Nora Karsten never shows herself in public," Lily suddenly said in her quiet voice. "She has never done it, and will never do it either."

Every one looked in surprise at the little speaker.

"But what on earth do you know about it?" exclaimed Countess Hedwig. "How do *you* come by such an acquaintance?"

"I know Nora Karsten very well, and am very fond of her," said Lily in the same quiet manner. "I was nearly a year in the convent with her, where she was brought up. She was the handsomest and the best of the pupils, and particularly good to us new girls."

"Really, Countess Lily, that is an original combination —a rider in the circus, who has been brought up in a convent"——

"I tell you that she is no circus-rider," repeated Lily obstinately. "Her mother did not wish it, and her father

who was very rich, caused her to be brought up in a convent. At that time we did not know anything about her father. Our chaplain told me all this later on."

"What does she look like?" asked Countess Hedwig with curiosity; "and where does she live?"

"She is more beautiful than any other girl I know," replied Lily, just a little spitefully. "I don't know where she lives, but I suppose with her father. But one thing I *do* know, and that is, that she will never do anything which we would not do ourselves; she is much too pious and too well brought up."

Lily had become quite red in her vehement defence. But for the first time a pair of eyes were fixed with interest upon her; it seemed as if Degenthal could bless her for each word she was uttering. For the first time also, he noticed the truth of Dahnow's praise of the line about her mouth.

A few minutes later, and he stood behind her chair.

"Can I have the cotillon, little cousin?" he asked softly.

Lily blushed deeply, and nodded in silence; she could not bring a "yes" out for very joy at so unexpected and blissful an event.

A few hours later, as the cotillon—the dance which lovers prefer—was in full swing, the countess could hardly believe her own eyes when she saw the couple sitting side by side. Curt seemed absorbed in his conversation, and Lily seemed to be in the seventh heaven.

The countess could not hear that it was only because the topic of their conversation was the convent that Curt was so attentive; she only saw the light dancing in Lily's small eyes. What! Had she perhaps been blind until now? Had she not noticed what the intimacy of home-life had brought about? Had she been in too great a hurry to get her son away? And, now, it would be folly indeed to break asunder the newly-spun threads.

The countess began looking out again for the old Excellency, and she had not far to look, for he was always hovering about the ladies' circle.

"Will you be very much shocked if I show myself *mobile*, as most women have the right to be, Excellency?" she said with a sweet smile.

"If you are a little changeable, it will only make you more like other mortals," said the old Excellency gallantly.

"Constantinople is, after all, very far away—the climate is not healthy; make the necessary sign, and let him be sent somewhere else."

"*Toujours au service des dames*," answered he; "Count X. will certainly be pleased to send any other attaché."

What variety is there even in unity of thought! At the same moment in which the old Excellency spoke those words, Curt leant reflectively back against his chair, his partner had just left him for a turn in the cotillon, and he began thinking of what he had heard about the director and his troop being in town. For the first time, he blessed his mother's consideration, in getting him sent away, He also thought of the old Excellency, and whether he could not manage, through him, to hasten his departure. It was such an unpleasant idea to be in town with Karsten, and to hear him talked about continually. He made up his mind to inquire at once as to the time when the Circus would be opened, in order to take the necessary steps beforehand.

The day after the ball he rode out at an early hour in the direction of the Circus, where he found workmen employed fitting everything up for the coming representations. He went in at once, hoping to see the director himself. Instead of him, however, he only met the dark disagreeable-looking man he had seen once before at Karsten's. He seemed to fill the office of overseer, and immediately pressed his questions upon the count,

whom he likewise recognised, and whose intercourse with the director evidently filled him with curiosity.

Curt thought to himself: "What an odious man that is!" In answer to his inquiries after the director, he ascertained from him that the latter had arrived, but that he had suddenly fallen ill. The man at once offered himself to accompany the count to the hotel in which the director was laid up. Curt refused the offer coldly and proudly, and as he did so, the man looked loweringly upon him.

As he once more mounted his horse, Degenthal had a tough combat with himself. It seemed cowardly not to visit the man to whom he would eventually be so nearly related, and whose guest he had so often been. Moreover, Lily's chatter had brought Nora's image so vividly before him, that he felt a great longing to hear something about her. He made up his mind at last, and turned his horse's head in the direction of the hotel where the director was staying. He did not notice that the dark fellow had followed him.

Arrived at the hotel, he sent up his card to the director. He was shown into a room, and the waiter politely asked him to sit down until he returned with the answer. A lady was standing by the window, and Curt, supposing it to be the director's wife, quickly advanced towards her. She turned, and a cry of joy broke from her lips.

"Curt! Curt!" and two arms were thrown round his neck, whilst a pretty head pressed itself on his shoulder.

"Nora, you here?" Curt answered very coldly in return; and his face betrayed symptoms of strong displeasure.

His kiss must also have been cold, for Nora raised her head in surprise.

"Are you sorry that we should meet? It was not our fault! We did not arrange it beforehand! It was quite by chance, you know."

"Why are you here?" he asked again angrily. "You

know how I hate your being where the company is, and how I wish you to remain in the villa."

Her arms sank hopelessly at her side, as he made her this reproof.

"My father fell suddenly ill," she said, "and we were sent for by telegram."

"Wouldn't his wife have been sufficient?" he asked, still more put out.

"O Curt! you're surely not thinking of what you're saying," she sadly cried. "Is it then so very disagreeable to you to find me here?"

"Disagreeable! No," he said, somewhat softened by the sadness of her tone. "But I do think it so unpardonably imprudent. Here, of all places, it is so desirable that you should not be mixed up with these people. And then, you know, how earnestly my mother wishes me to abide by the conditions made, and how am I to do so when you are so near?"

The last words made up for all, particularly as he then drew her tenderly towards him.

"I will go away again as soon as I can," she said gently.

"I shall also be going away soon," he said. "It is so far good that we should have met, as I can tell you thus, that I am going far away, and for some time, too."

"You are going to travel?" she asked, and her blue eyes looked anxiously up at him. "O Curt! don't be so dreadfully unreasonable!"

"It is much better I should, it is necessary I should," he said, with the obstinacy young men like to employ against women's arguments perhaps in order to assert their manly superiority. "It is better that I should not spend the time of trial here. I shall soon go as attaché to the embassy at Constantinople. I daily realise the wisdom of my mother's advice in that particular."

Nora was silent during a few minutes, as if she were

trying to realise the sense of these words. All of a sudden she threw her arms round his neck, and cried out wildly: "Curt, Curt, they only want to separate us for ever! They want you to break your engagement! It does not suffice to them that we should not correspond, they want to put a great distance between us."

Curt drew her still closer to him.

"As if the heart knew anything about distance!" he said tenderly, pressing his lips to her forehead.

"Yes, it does!" she cried passionately. "So long as we breathe the same air, I feel that I have something in common with you. So long as we are amongst the same people, and in the same country, there is one link between us. But the farther you are away from me, the more you are surrounded by strangers, the more difficult it is for our thoughts to meet! Curt, even the trees change their foliage upon foreign soil, and hearts can also change. Alas! Believe me, dear, that is what they reckon upon!"

"It was of my own free will that I made up my mind to go," he said, somewhat offended at this suspicion thrown upon his manly independence. "I have considered the matter well, and have seen how much better it is for us that I should take this course. Are you, then, so afraid that your love should not be able to resist absence?"

"My love? Oh no! To us women it is the principal part of our life—to you it is only *a* part, and a secondary one too. Oh, tell your mother that you will be faithful to the conditions, but don't go away!"

Curt bent over her, and smoothed back the masses of her black hair from her burning temples. He kissed her eyelashes too—a tear was trembling upon them.

"Don't be childish, Nora; a few miles farther cannot make any difference. Did your poor Toggenburger also forget in the East?" he added jokingly.

Nora was just going to answer, but at the same moment

Curt started, and letting go of her, looked proudly and impatiently up. Nora also raised her eyes, and her forehead and cheeks became purple. In the opposite doorway stood the dark man of the Circus, a sarcastic smile playing upon his lips.

"The director begs Miss Nora to come to him at once," he said, and disappeared.

Curt bit his lips. "Who is that insupportable creature?" he said angrily. "Quite the face of a spy. Did not I tell you how imprudent it was that you should have come here?"

"That is Landolfo, my father's man of business," she said depressed. "He is also very antipathetic to me, and forces himself so upon us. He thinks himself so much more than other people. But my father praises his cleverness, and we must not be difficult if we want to have the necessary forces."

"*We!*" said Curt again angrily. "For Heaven's sake, don't identify yourself with those people!"

"O Curt! you take everything the wrong way to-day!" she said sadly. "You knew before what my father's business was!" This time she moved not a step towards him, and the handsome head was erect and proud. "I must go to my father," she added. "Do you wish to see him? He is a little better since yesterday."

"I had rather not see him to-day," said Curt. "I do not feel in the proper mood, nor do I wish to knock against that fellow again: but I shall call another day to see him. It is not our fault that chance should have brought us together. I shall also know more about my journey. Remember me to your father."

He wanted to kiss her, but with a proud gesture she moved a step back, and only allowed her hand to rest a moment in his.

Curt went away displeased with her, with himself, and

with the whole meeting. The fact that some one else was aware of their having met, and the parting in which Nora had shown herself so much hurt, were equally unpleasant thoughts to him. He would have grieved more had he seen the scalding tears which rolled down Nora's cheeks as she sat by her father's bed and thought the scene over again. He would have felt more uncomfortable still had he seen the malignant black eyes which followed him down the stairs.

"I say, pretty one," asked Landolfo of the chambermaid, who was just coming his way, "how was the gentleman called who was here just now?"

"There's his card, please, sir," said the girl. "The waiter said I ought to have given it to the young lady, but the gentleman was already in the room."

"Ah! ah!" said he, grinding his teeth. "That's why the Bella Donna is so precious fine! She only thinks a count good enough to make up to her! He's got just the right name for offering that sort of thing to his stuck-up family!"

The same evening Countess Degenthal found amongst her letters one written in an unknown hand. Its contents ran thus: "A friend warns you that your son called to-day upon Miss Nora Karsten, the daughter of the circus-rider. Should you wish to prevent further intrigue, it is high time. Everything is done in order to bind him and to make the matter public. I cannot warn you otherwise."

The countess was dumfounded on reading this. What a dreadful blow to her newly-born hopes. Had his conduct only changed, in order to throw dust in her eyes? Had it only been a base calculation? She was indignant with her son; indignant with "those people," although, indeed, she added, that nothing else could be expected of them.

It went against her to act upon an anonymous letter; but intrigue for intrigue; she must, at every cost, detach her son from such unworthy links.

Her mind was soon made up; a letter was sent off at once to the old Excellency, who must have found she had made progress in the virtue he had praised her for a day earlier. She besought him to manage that her son should be sent away at once—every hour was precious. She said nothing, but the tone of the letter was such that the experienced man of the world guessed the reason of her entreaties.

"So, so! Is that the way the wind blows?" said the old gentleman, applying a pinch of snuff to his nose. "Who would have thought the steady young man given to such freaks? Still waters run deep! In that case it will certainly be good for him to be sent away. So that's the reason why the mamma did not mind his being sent to Constantinople, and looked so dissatisfied with him! She is a wise woman in her generation! Well, we must see what can be done."

The old gentleman liked to show all that he was capable of. Notwithstanding the late hour, his carriage rolled to the door of one of his omnipotent friends. The countess might well be satisfied with his zeal.

Early the next morning Count Curt received a missive, stating that he was begged to go to the Foreign Office, where he was given despatches, and was at once ordered off to Pera.

Curt, who had expected this for some time, was not in the least surprised. Had he not been so busy he might have noticed that his mother showed hardly any signs of emotion at this sudden and distant separation. Lily's face was the sadder and the more surprised of the two.

Of course, there was a great deal too much to be done

at the last moment, for him to think even of bidding Nora a last farewell, or of making her any explanation. Before the short winter day had been brought to a close, Curt sat in the express train which carried him farther and farther away from her.

CHAPTER XII.

CURT had been established a month at Constantinople. He had been so busy, so taken up by new impressions, that he had not had much time left for past memories. After all the various emotions of the foregoing year, it did him good to find himself amongst a fresh set of people. A constant state of agitation is wearing in the long-run, notwithstanding any amount of love. Moreover, he was dissatisfied with Nora and with himself since their last meeting, and he was glad to chase away these thoughts and those attached to them, if only for a while.

A month passes quickly, when we are surrounded by fresh interests and associations. But a month passes slowly when we are hanging for news, and one day after another goes by without our receiving any. The parallel had evidently not struck Curt, but a letter from Dahnow soon brought it home to him, and awoke him from the sort of trance he had been living in.

"You may think what you like about my meddling," wrote the Mecklenburger dryly and categorically, "but I cannot see what right you have to make any girl so miserable, particularly one to whom you have vowed fidelity and love. Of course, I cannot judge of the validity of those reasons which made you take so sudden

and so distant a flight; but it strikes me that you ought not to have concealed them from her to whom you have given a right over your life. I need hardly tell you the name of her who has been waiting in vain all these long weeks for news of you, for one explanatory word. You ought to know better than I how so sensitive a nature must have suffered during this trial. I very much question whether she derived any great comfort from the fact that I—having accidentally heard she was here—called upon her, and told her that you had arrived safely at Pera. Perhaps it would have been better, had she been able to think that an indisposition had prevented your writing to her, rather than to know that you had no reason whatsoever for such unpardonable conduct. Forgive me this phrase; but I can find no other when I think of her grief. You seem uncommonly particular in keeping the conditions, notwithstanding the change in your plans, which made an explanation due to her. Love's logic is rather different to yours, it strikes me! Karsten's wife and daughter leave this town to-morrow; until now they were kept here by the director's illness. I shall also start to-morrow on my way home. Should you feel inclined to send me a sample of your epistolary style, pray address to me there."

This letter was clear enough. Curt did not require a long examination of conscience in order to recognise his fault. What had he been about? What was he thinking of to have left her thus, after so cold a parting? As he now thought over the last four weeks, they fell with a heavy weight of remorse upon his heart. Once more the words she had said resounded in his ears: "O Curt! Curt! don't go away! They only want to separate us for ever." And instead of answering her, he had left her without one explanatory or conciliatory word. And, after all, why had he started off so hurriedly? The scales now fell from his

eyes, and he saw that the matter must have been arranged by his mother. Why had she been so pleased when he told her that he was to start at once. And how calm she was when he took leave of her! His chief at Constantinople, too, had also manifested a passing surprise when he presented himself before him. Now, everything was clear to him. Nora was right—they had wanted to separate him from her, and they had succeeded. His mother had taken measures in order to hasten his departure, with the hope he would thus forget his love. He understood now what her intention had been, and it pained him all the more, because he felt that she had won the day.

With his love, his feeling of independence awoke in him once more. Did they, perhaps, think they could conquer him thus? Would they try to bend his resistance because they had not been able to break it?

And Nora, his beloved Nora, whom he had forsaken in so cruel a manner! He painted her anger to himself in darker colours even than the reality, for he did not know how many excuses a woman's heart can find for the conduct of the man she loves. And Dahnow, too, who had been to see her, and to whom she had poured out her sorrows—for Dahnow spoke about her sensitive nature. Would everything conspire against him? "Never mind," he thought, "and if the whole world were against me, I would not be conquered, provided Nora's heart be not changed. But what can I do to obtain her forgiveness? I must give her some undeniable proof that I regret my past conduct, and that she is as dear to me as ever."

Thus ran his thoughts, and he stamped his foot with impatience at the distance which separated them. What good was a letter now? And then, perhaps, she would not get it—for once taken in, he saw intrigue at every turn.

At last he sprang up with a sudden joy, and began a sort of triumphant march across his room, as if the battle

were already won. He was young, he was in love—two good reasons for many a wild determination—he was jealous into the bargain, and that spurred him on. He threw Dahnow's letter on one side and took up a time-table and a map. Distances hardly exist in our century, and, in love as in war, many a thing is both allowed and possible. Would Dahnow have been satisfied at last with this piece of logic?

The next morning, Degenthal's servant brought the ambassador a note containing the news that his master was ill, and would not be able to leave his bed for some days; the doctor having ordered complete repose.

"Dear! dear!" thought the old gentleman as he read the letter. "It's the old story! He will have committed some imprudence, as all our Germans do, who will not be careful in this climate. I shall have to look after the youth!"

A few days later, the sun was shining upon a castle which rose proudly amidst the villas surrounding it. This castle, of small dimensions it is true, was situated in the vicinity of a town in Central Germany. It was always pointed out to strangers as having been bought by a European celebrity, director Karsten. Guides expatiated upon the beauty of the castle and of its large park, and also mentioned the enormous sum the director had given for it.

It was not only the castle upon which the sun shone; it also threw its benignant rays upon a young girl sitting on the balcony—a lovely flower amidst the surrounding beauty of spring. But her eyes were half closed and heavy, as if they had shed many a tear. Her whole attitude was depressed, and her hands lay idle on her knees, as if she had enough to do with thinking. She seemed not to care for the lovely garden beneath, or to enjoy the perfume which arose from the flowers. It was to her as if all things on earth were clouded and misty, and she wondered, in a dreamy, listless way, at the change which

had come over the earth since the last spring, when all had been so enchanting to her. Was it only on the Rhine that the air was sweet and the sun bright? or was it rather that the charm had gone with his presence, the sunshine vanished with his fondness?

Nora was not quite clear about it herself. She did not like to admit that she was hurt at his silence, and yet it gnawed at her heart; she fought against distrust, and yet it found its way into her mind. The trial had seemed so easy a one at first. "Two years would pass so quickly," her loving heart had murmured, and now that six months only had elapsed, there seemed to be a fearful abyss between them. Would it grow wider and wider, deeper and deeper, until they were parted for ever? Their meeting too, had been so bitter-sweet. How often had she wished that, in spite of all, chance might bring them together, and now that they had met she almost unwished it, for it had been so different from what she had hoped. Of course, she told herself over and over again that it was perhaps better he should travel, that even a chance meeting was dangerous as matters stood; but her heart was stronger than her reason, and she groaned to herself: "O Curt! Why must you be so dreadfully sensible?"

And the warm spring breeze blew upon her burning cheeks as if with a caress, but it hurt her; it seemed so playful and so false whilst she was so sad and so lonely. A tear rolled down and fell upon her white hands, and Nora thought her heart would break with pain and longing.

She evidently did not hear the carriage which had driven up to the gate, and from which a young man had sprung, without even listening to the coachman's directions as to the way up to the castle.

"He is in hot-haste," muttered the old man, looking with satisfaction at his *pour-boire*. "I'll bet anything

he's on a visit to his lady-love! They're always in a hurry and openhanded in that case."

Whilst the coachman was thus giving vent to his psychological reflections, the traveller had found his way across the windings of the plantation. He appeared tired, his hair was out of order as well as his dress, and yet his eyes were bright and glad as he looked about him, seemingly in search of some one. At last he espied the figure on the balcony. A low cry of joy escaped his lips, and a few rapid strides brought him to the foot of the low stone steps. She now heard that some one was approaching, and turned a wondering and cold look upon the stranger.

"Nora! Nora!" he cried, and his arm was round her waist.

For one moment she remained quite still, as if she could hardly believe her own eyes, and then a ray of intense happiness lighted up her lovely face, and a cry of deep rejoicing arose from her heart, . . . they were in each other's arms, and they clung to each other, those two who loved one another so dearly.

When at last they were able to speak, there was no end to all they had to ask and to recount.

Did he really deserve a great scolding for having travelled three days and two nights straight from the Bosphorus in order to catch a glimpse of her? Perhaps he did; but she praised him for it too: and how anxious about him she was! Of course, he laughed at her fears with a man's superiority, and yet was pleased with them the while, with a man's inconsequence. Every minute was sweet and precious. The clouds and the mist had suddenly disappeared, and the spring was as radiant and glorious as could be.

The grave nun had said that human love did not count for much before God's throne; but on earth it is the great

beautifier of our existence—the fairy wand which turns copper into gold.

It was quite in the order of things, but it is perhaps well to remark, that, whilst the two lovers were so happy together, they did not give a thought to the person who had been the cause of their meeting thus. At last Degenthal did mention that he had felt jealous of Dahnow, and Nora laughed heartily at such an idea.

"Oh yes; Baron Dahnow had been very friendly and amiable, but she had not a notion whither he had gone."

Neither Nora nor Curt had the remotest idea what a chivalrous feat the fat baron had accomplished on the day he wrote to Curt.

"So now we are quits," he had said to himself after throwing that letter into the post-box. "My conscience is at ease. If he does not come after that his love is not worth twopence. This letter must expiate my two former ones. I will not be responsible for those sad eyes. I meddled once, so I was right to meddle again. And now it's over!"

But if the good Mecklenburger's conscience was at ease, there was still something which put him out, for after the letter had gone he was more serious and more meditative than before.

"I also must try what distance will do for me," he said at last. "What's the good of being free from all social or family duties if I cannot do what I like? Upon my word, all that studying has put me quite out of sorts."

Shortly afterwards Baron Dahnow astonished his numerous relations by announcing his intention of henceforward giving up books for nature.

"Are *you* going to turn *mobile?*" asked his brothers with a laugh. "You'll end by becoming an African explorer!"

"I prefer eating to being eaten," said the fat one, "and I will therefore leave Africa alone. But I must get away from civilisation and from railways. I shall study *uncivilised* lands and people; everything is so flat and commonplace in Europe!"

"You of all people in the world! How will you ever bring your lazy self to scramble up the Chimborazo or the Himalayas?"

"No! I shall be carried up," answered Dahnow laconically. "I know how to make myself comfortable anywhere." And he certainly considered his comfort in the preparations he made for his journey.

Curt had meanwhile returned to Constantinople after his wild escape. Count X., the ambassador, was sitting in his room one morning when his youngest attaché was announced. "So you're quite well again?" asked the old gentleman, looking fixedly at him.

"Oh! I never felt better," answered the youth, who did indeed look radiant with health and happiness.

"Your servant kept severe custody upon you," the ambassador continued slowly. "Although I called more than once, I never could get at you. The doctor, too, was very silent."

"Your Excellency was really too kind," stammered the youth. "The doctor"——

The ambassador arose and laid his hand upon the young man's shoulder. "You're a bad diplomatist, my friend," he said with a satirical smile. "Your intrigues are not finely woven, and your face does not conceal your feelings. To what bathing-place did the Trieste ship take you?"

Curt stood silent and confused before his chief.

The latter traversed the room a few times, and then said impressively, "Young man, do not flitter away the best years of your life in unworthy bondage."

Curt looked up frankly and proudly at him. "Excel-

lency, the happiness of a person I esteem as much as I love was at stake."

Count X. looked at him more earnestly than before. "I think well of you," he said, "but I have been told that you were in danger of committing some great folly —of shipwrecking your life's happiness. I see that the folly is at least no unworthy one; but be careful. Unless I am much mistaken, you are not the man to conquer your passion at any cost, and, notwithstanding opposition. God grant that you may not make yourself miserable for life!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE world seemed beautiful to Nora after Curt's flying visit, and yet there were clouds in the distant horizon, and cold showers threatened to chase the spring away. At home, too, clouds were to be seen, and to be seen with a sad foreboding. But Nora would not look at them, she would not rob her heart of the calm and joy with which Curt's visit had filled it; otherwise, she might, indeed, have been sad at the great change which had come over her father's temper since his illness. He was irritable and agitated about every small thing; and even the birth of a son did not suffice to cure him of his ill-humour. He had received the new-comer with intense satisfaction, but after the first days his brow had once more become clouded.

Nora had been overjoyed at the thought of possessing a little brother who might, in time, be a comfort to her father when she would no longer be at his side. She thought Karsten's ill-humour must proceed from some physical reason, for both his wife and his boy were blooming with health. But he was more indefatigable than ever, coming often to the villa, in which, it is true, he only spent a few hours. He was

always accompanied by Landolfo: Landolfo, the indispensable, with whom he held long and mysterious consultations.

He was, indeed, a remarkable man this "Signor Landolfo," for thus he chose to be called, and thus his name was always to be seen in large letters upon the play-bills. His tall figure, his fine profile, and his shiny black locks, produced a great effect upon the vulgar crowd. But those of more refined taste were disagreeably impressed by the false and yet impertinent look of his dark eyes, and by the sensuality of his thick lips, imperfectly concealed as they were by a well-trimmed moustache and beard. Had any one felt a wish to study his past—no very edifying or improving study—one might have traced Landolfo back to a simple "Levi." But he reminded one more of Schiller's poetical image, inasmuch as "one knew not whence he came," and one might add: "his track was quickly lost whenever he took leave."

He had appeared under all sorts of different names, and had disappeared a dozen times at least, without leaving any trace of his old self behind him. A disappointed genius, he had tried his fortune first on the stage, then at the brush, then again at the pen. One day, finding himself particularly short of money, he had engaged himself to a small circus. His showy appearance and his agility gained him some reputation in the insignificant troop, and at last, with the assurance which characterised him, he had offered his valuable services to Director Karsten. Landolfo's talent as an equestrian was above the average, but Karsten was struck by his taste in decoration and effect, and his aptitude for business. He soon became a very important member of the troop, by the ease and originality with which he fitted up new scenes; and his facility with the pen made him likewise very valuable in the director's eyes. Landolfo was not the

man to let opportunities slip out of his hands, and he made such good use of Karsten's foible for him, that he very soon was entrusted with the whole management of affairs. The director, who had never had any particular talent for business, was delighted to be able thus to rid himself of trouble, and Landolfo's quick and cunning eye to the main chance always impressed his employers with a great opinion of his cleverness.

During the last few months the director had stood in great need of advice. Until then he had been the first and best in his line. He had thus reaped such a golden harvest, that he could afford every kind of comfort and luxury to himself and to his family. But now, since the preceding winter, Karsten had a rival who did all he could to put his adversary in the shade, and to gain the favour of the public. He evidently had money to lay out for the purpose; and had more inventive power than Karsten in bringing new elements into his Circus, and in exciting the interest of the lookers-on.

Novelty hath ever a charm, and the director soon perceived that his audience was no longer so numerous, and his purse no longer so well-filled as of yore. He found himself compelled to make new and greater efforts, in order to compete successfully with his rival. Some of his best forces, tempted by greater offers, had gone over to the enemy, so that, in reality, Karsten's Circus was no longer so good as it had been. This fact stung his pride to the very quick, and at any cost he wished to create some new means of attraction, in order to regain his former popularity. He was, however, forced to spend enormous sums in the attempt, and what with these expenses, and the maintaining of so many people and horses, he felt himself going rapidly down hill.

He could not give up the villa or change anything in his mode of living, lest people should say he was ruined,

and as, in this world, a natural and logical consequence, completely forsake his Circus.

It was these preoccupations which, during the winter, had affected his health, and now, a new disaster fell upon him. The banker, with whom he had placed his capital, had made unfortunate speculations, and had gone bankrupt. This naturally made the director gloomy, and, at the same time, it brought him oftener to the villa, in order to consult certain lawyers in the neighbouring town.

To-day he had arrived quite unexpectedly, and had sent Landolfo at once into town with commissions. The sight of the baby and of his wife, so completely restored to health, cheered him up a little, but as often as he looked at Nora, his ill-humour seemed to return. Her engagement to the count weighed upon him uncomfortably in the present state of his affairs.

He was sitting with his family on the evening of his return; and it was a comfortable little party which was established in Mrs. Karsten's drawing-room as Landolfo entered it.

The director arose rapidly and went towards him. In him he saw his only remaining resource, so blinded was he by the advice Landolfo had given him, and which had now and then been crowned with success. He therefore always endeavoured to make Landolfo more at home in his family circle, and he received him to-day with demonstrative marks of friendship.

Landolfo was quite the man to suit Mrs. Karsten. Was he not the very type of the set she had been brought up in? And what seemed coarseness to Nora, seemed piquancy to her. She was extremely amiable to him, thus bringing out in greater relief the coldness with which he was treated by Nora. To Nora he was inexpressibly antipathetic; and to natural antipathy, she added rea-

soned distrust, since he had surprised her meeting with Curt.

The director offered him to remain a few moments in the drawing-room, which offer was a signal for Nora to rise and move towards the door. Landolfo bit his lips angrily, for now he knew what kept him at so great a distance from his master's daughter, and he felt not only humiliated, but jealous.

Such beauty as hers could not leave him unimpressed, and since he had made such strides in the director's confidence, he had allowed his imagination to build up the most splendid castles in the air with regard to the daughter. Landolfo had no mean idea of his own talents and charms; and, indeed, it is seldom that a man does not think himself irresistible. As for the director, Landolfo felt sure that he would be agreeable to him; and could thus conveniently go on with the management of affairs, as he had done hitherto.

He had been so accustomed to his attentions towards the fair sex being a case of *veni, vidi, vici,* that he had had no doubt of his success with Nora.

At first he had explained her coldness to him by the distance she had placed between herself and the rest of the troop. But since that memorable day, when he had surprised Count Degenthal and Nora sitting side by side in lover's fashion, he felt that he had found the real clue to the evident repulsion with which he inspired her.

His first little act of revenge had been well worthy of his low and vulgar self, in the anonymous letter he had sent the countess. At the time he had only considered the matter in the light of a low love intrigue, probably to end in dishonour. A few words which the director let fall had opened his eyes on that score; but as Nora's conduct had been more distant than ever since that day, his thirst for revenge had increased. Yes, he would humble

her, he would crush that proud heart, and bring it to his feet. Perhaps, after all, she would be brought, if not to love him, at all events to marry him, and to be his slave, and now the father's difficulties seemed to be a weight thrown in his balance.

Pale with rage he had stepped back as she had turned to go away, and as he made room for her his dark eyes rested upon her with a wicked flash. At that moment Landolfo made up his mind.

The director's eyes had also followed his daughter with displeasure, and in order to pour balsam upon Landolfo's wounded pride, he said, "No; come into my room, Landolfo; we had better begin business at once—and ladies understand nothing about business, you know."

"They certainly seem to have no taste for simple and honest MEN of business, however much advantage may be gained from them," said Landolfo sharply, and in so loud a tone that Nora must have heard him.

"But *I* know how to appreciate them," said Mrs. Karsten from her *chaise longue*, upon which she was gracefully reclining, her head ensconced in soft pink satin and delicate white lace. Karsten, mind you bring Signor Landolfo back, and do not deprive us of him the whole evening," she added, holding out her hand, which Landolfo gallantly kissed.

"Come," said the director impatiently, and leading him into his study. "What news have you?" he added almost tremulously, before even the door was closed.

As soon as Landolfo was alone with the director, his submissive and respectful air completely disappeared; he was far too indispensable to that man to be particular about his manners towards him.

Before vouchsafing an answer he leisurely lit a cigar, to which important operation he devoted even more time than is usually necessary; then he threw himself negli-

gently into an arm-chair, and puffed at his cigar until he could make sure that it was properly lighted. Meanwhile the director was pacing his room up and down with long strides.

"Here are letters!" said Landolfo at last, throwing a small packet upon the table.

"And the banker? What news from him?" asked the director excitedly.

"At the best, you are in for a great loss; two-thirds will go, if not more."

"Good heavens! that is the death-stroke!" exclaimed the director. "The loss is an irreparable one under present circumstances. We have had nothing but expenses during the whole winter, and the income has considerably diminished."

Landolfo was silent, and watched with interest the nice little white clouds arising from his cigar and disappearing one after the other into vacuum.

"Two-thirds lost!" muttered the director; "I tell you that's ruin!"

"One single lucky season would set you upon your legs again."

"But how can I conjure up a lucky season?" cried the director angrily. "That fellow there has put it into his head to ruin me, and he has colossal means to back him. Depend upon it, it is an intrigue got up in order to rob me of the result of these long years of labour. But I won't be beaten; indeed, I won't."

"What news have you from the troop?" asked Landolfo in the same quiet tones again.

The director shrugged his shoulders. "The new clowns have asked for an augmentation of their salary for the next quarter, and, of course, I cannot pay them; the cashier calls out for money, and the audience is well nigh reduced to zero. The new company has naturally visited

all the great towns in Central Germany, so as to spoil the game for us. Such low performances, too; they must needs get lions over, and will probably be having monkeys soon, I'll bet! What a downfall from our training of fine and noble horses!" he added indignantly.

"Engage a *lioness;* that would be a better attraction than anything else," said Landolfo with a hideous leer.

The director did not seem to follow this last remark; he was busied with the letters which Landolfo had placed upon the table. As he had finished one, a low curse passed across his lips. "This also," he said, throwing the paper away. "What has come over the girl? She is my best *manége*-rider, that Miss Elise, and has just given me notice. It's too bad, for I had acceded to her ridiculous pretensions. That man has evidently caught her also."

"What does she write?" asked Landolfo indifferently.

"Read for yourself. A lot of stupid phrases which I do not even understand. Now, that is really the crowning of the edifice."

Landolfo read the letter, and replaced it with methodic order upon the table.

"I thought so," he said, leaning back.

"What did you think? What does she want?" asked the director irritably.

"Oh! its offended artist pride! Miss Nora didn't choose to return her visit. A little display of judicious pride, which did not quite suit our beauty. They're not made of such pliant stuff as the like of us."

"Stupid nonsense!" answered the director; "the girl will spoil everything for me before the day's out, with her hoity-toity ideas."

Faithful to his old habit, the director began once more pacing the room.

"What on earth shall we do, Landolfo?" he said at last.

"Engage another beauty; Miss Elise already belonged to the old stock."

"That's all very fine!" cried the director, "but where am I to find her—this new beauty? Remember, too, what enormous pretensions they make, now that they know how the other man will arm them with money, and I haven't wherewithal to pay them. I tell you again its ruin; I can't bear it any longer!"

"I know no one better able to laugh at ruin than you," remarked Landolfo, rising and knocking his ashes carefully with his second finger into a dainty little ash-dish.

"I?" asked the director astonished, and trying in vain to catch a glimpse of Landolfo's averted face. "What do you mean? I know you're a clever man. Have you any other plan in your head? Speak!"

"Miss Nora," said Landolfo, with his face still averted as if occupied with his cigar. "Miss Nora is the best rider I know. Mademoiselle Elise was not to be talked of on the same day with her; moreover, she is remarkably beautiful, and will soon bring the whole world to admire her. Let Miss Nora appear in public, and you have won the day."

Karsten started back.

"My daughter does not ride in public," he said, after a pause, with a hoarse voice.

Landolfo was silent.

"Her mother did not wish it," continued Karsten, as if to strengthen his conscience against himself.

"Circumstances alter the case," said Landolfo shortly.

"She will never consent to it," exclaimed the director.

"Miss Nora is said to be very pious, I hear; she will assuredly know what her duty to her father is, and will make a sacrifice in order to save him from certain ruin."

The director felt heavy drops of sweat chasing one another upon his brow.

"The fact is that she has other duties to perform; she is engaged, and I have given the count my word."

Landolfo indulged in a low laugh.

"Ah! really engaged with a young Austrian count, perhaps; anyhow, it wasn't very official until now."

"It was to remain a secret during the two years," answered the director somewhat awkwardly.

"Ha! ha! We know what such engagements mean," said Landolfo, shrugging his shoulders; "engagements, *entre nous*, so that one may be at liberty to do as one likes. I suppose that's the reason why the young gentleman has hurried off to the East. The haughty mamma seems to encourage the matter."

"Where did you say?" asked Karsten, to whom Nora had said nothing of Curt's absence; she herself knew the reason why.

"He has been named attaché to the embassy at Pera," said Landolfo. "I suppose a little change of air was considered good for his health. Believe me, my friend, this Eastern traveller will not cross your plans much," he added, laying his hand confidentially upon the director's shoulder. "Don't let us mince matters. It's the old story; one may be in love, but marriage" . . . and a low whistle completed the sentence.

"I believe the count to be a man of honour," said the director, with a deep blush rushing to his cheeks. He turned indignantly away from the touch of his inferior, and stood before him for one moment with all his former dignity.

"So do I," answered Landolfo with perfect calmness; "but he is young, very young! You must be fair, director. From his point of view it's a great folly; and follies, as a rule, do not last. Three days' constancy in such circumstances is already very meritorious. However

sweet the folly may be, it destroys itself, and in this case I happen to know that the pair have already had a little tiff."

"How do you know anything about it?" asked the director in a commanding tone.

"A lucky or unlucky circumstance, as you may take it, was the cause of my witnessing a little love scene between them: Miss Nora in tears, because the count was reproaching her for having gone to Vienna, and thus mixing herself up with the troop; Miss Nora, indignant at first; then imploring her lover not to undertake his journey to the East. The count's answer was to start off that very same night, without even bidding her farewell."

"I have heard nothing of all this."

"I daresay it was unpleasant to Miss Nora, and that she therefore kept it to herself," answered Landolfo. "I have noticed her irritation of late. But Miss Nora is a remarkable young lady, and a clever one, to boot; as soon as a thing is put clearly before her, she will herself understand the necessity of action. She will understand," he continued slowly and distinctly, "that her situation towards the count will not be improved by her father's bankruptcy, and that Count Degenthal's family will hardly be more inclined to receive her with open arms as the daughter of a ruined circus-rider than as that of a rich man."

Karsten seemed to have been turned to stone during this last speech of Landolfo. Yes; he remembered his conversation with the chaplain and the dowry he had promised his daughter, and which he would now be unable to pay. Once again he said to himself, that she would be an unnatural daughter if she could forsake him in such a moment; if she did not make the small sacrifice in order to save him. And yet he felt it, and said it with a moan, "She will never do it!"

"She must have a strange idea of filial piety," observed

Landolfo coldly. "We are not supposed to be worth much, and yet we should understand our duty otherwise. Anyhow, wait till to-morrow before you make up your mind. The house is not yet on fire. During three months we can keep up our credit, and if the worse comes to the worst, depend upon it, Miss Nora will not be heartless enough to say no. Just try it." So saying, he lit another cigar, and remained standing a moment as if he expected the director to speak.

But Karsten was silent. The red spots on his cheek darkened, and his thoughts seemed to be painfully at work; yet he said not a syllable. When Landolfo asked whether he might retire, a silent nod was the only answer. He went, and the director was alone.

It would be unnatural if the child refused to save her father. This was the one thought which occupied his brain. The count! The count! That had been a foolish love story, which was already at an end. After all she would only return to the position to which she had been born. He had kept his word to her mother in giving her the education she had desired for her. But circumstances now altered the case, as Landolfo had so justly said. For one moment it had occurred to him to sell all that he possessed, and to retire from the whole business. This, however, he could not do without incurring great loss: and then how humiliating it would be to have given way before his rival!

"It wouldn't serve her, and it would be of no good to me," he thought to himself. . . . "However, I will not try to force her," he murmured. "I will explain the whole matter to her, and she will do as she chooses."

"No, I will not speak to her—I will not be such a coward!" he repeated later on to himself during that long and sleepless night. But then again the tempter's voice said, "Would it not be unnatural that the child should refuse to save her father?"

CHAPTER XIV.

EARLY the next morning Nora had mounted her horse and had set off for a pleasant ride in the fresh and brisk morning air. Her heart was dancing for joy, and her horse was prancing about under her, as if in accordance with her feelings. This was a joyful anniversary for her. A month ago, Curt had held her in his arms and told her, at least for the hundredth time, that his love was unchanged and unchangeable.

As she passed through the court which was separated by a low wall from the park, she saw her father standing at the window of his writing-room. She nodded to him, and then made her horse perform all sorts of graceful and pretty freaks, such as she knew he loved, then nodding once more, and springing over the wall, she set off at full gallop through the park.

Did he see her? Yes, indeed! He watched with pride the manner in which she ruled her horse, and the grace with which she directed its steps.

It was a young and fiery animal, which he had lately picked out of his stables so that she might try her hand and exercise her talent upon it. It had hardly been mounted before she took it in hand, and now she might have led it with a silk thread. As she flew proudly through the

air, he was once more struck by her incomparable beauty.

"He is right! she would soon have the whole world at her feet," he muttered; "she would surpass them all. And she would enjoy it also, for she is my own daughter," he added.

As the happy and careless girl galloped along, she hardly dreamt of the result her little display of filial coquetry had brought about. She had only wanted to amuse him a little—that poor father who during the last months had looked so sad and so full of care. What could be weighing upon him, she wondered. But then again happy remembrances of the past and bright dreams of the future chased away all other thoughts. How quickly the time had gone by, how rapidly months would roll away; and then she would be Curt's! How pleasant that sounded! She went on repeating to herself each one of the words he had spoken, and her mind's eye saw him standing before her so true, so noble, and so pure! Last, not least, her woman's heart told her with a delicious throbbing that she was loved, nay, passionately loved by him. Unconsciously her hand pulled at the reins, so that the fiery animal snorted as if in sheer surprise.

And then her thoughts travelled on into years to come —years that seemed so far, far away. She would belong to him, she would bear his noble and stainless name, and would gain through him that solid footing which failed her so in her present position. Her mind and heart rose as she thought of living at his side, and of aiming at great ends in the circle in which God would thus place her.

She was not indifferent to a great position, nor to the charms of living in good society, and she admitted it to herself. Great happiness has its principal source in the heart's satisfaction, but there are other sources, too, which tend to make the stream a clearer and stronger one.

Hours slip by quickly when one dreams of love, and ponders over life's sweet secrets, particularly if one be riding alone, as Nora was, on a sunny morning, under the shadow of green trees.

The sun was already high in the heavens when she remembered it was getting late, and she turned her horse's head towards home. The shortest road lay across a small stream which formed the boundary of the wood; there, on the other side of a narrow bridge, lay the road to the town. The soil was slippery on the edge of the stream, so that her horse made a false step, and it was only her firm hold of the reins which prevented his falling.

"How dangerous that place looks," she thought to herself, turning her head back, and the bent and broken bushes, the slippery edge, and the little bridge impressed itself upon her memory.

At home she did not find her family in the drawing-room, as was usual at this hour. Supposing her step-mother to be in the garden with the baby, she went to her father's study in order to wish him good-morning. The sight which met her caused her to remain standing at the door, her eyes wide open, with a scared and frightened look, and her hands holding her heart, as if she had suddenly felt a pain there. Her father was sitting at his writing-table, his head leaning heavily upon his hand, and his whole attitude expressing deep despair. A paper lay open before him, evidently a telegram, for its green cover was upon the floor.

In a second she was at his side, embracing him tenderly, and asking him in the softest language what was the cause of his sorrow. She loved her father dearly, and now a little sting of remorse had mixed itself with her love, for she felt that another one disputed the right of precedence with him in her heart.

This made her more tender than usual, and the director

received her coaxing with manifest signs of satisfaction. But she asked him in vain to tell her the cause of his sorrow.

How naturally it comes to us in such moments to say that we are ready to suffer everything, to bear with everything, in order to remove the sorrows of those we love. And yet the words, flowing from our heart as they do, sometimes take a form and shape before which we ourselves are terrified.

The director raised his face, and, looking into his daughter's entreating eyes, saw her anxious expression. Perhaps it was his better self which made him at that moment push her almost roughly away from him.

"Go," he said, "you belong to another; you no longer belong to me, and can do nothing for me."

Nora's eyes were filled with tears at this reproach. She felt that her father was right, that her heart indeed belonged to another, but that made her all the more desirous of proving to her father that her devotion and affection for him were unchanged. She lavished tender words upon him, and unconsciously glancing at the telegram, she saw that its contents alluded to a pecuniary question. This gave her courage to beg and implore him to tell her all, and to promise him that she would bear anything for his sake.

The telegram was from Landolfo, and announced that matters were even worse than he had thought the day before, so that Karsten might with reason consider half his fortune lost.

Nora now appeared to him as the saving straw.

He looked steadfastly at his child, and said in slow and depressed tones: "If any one can help me, it is you."

"I!" repeated Nora in surprise, but at the same moment she remembered that her mother's fortune belonged to her, and that with it she might save her father.

"Papa!" she said tenderly, "are you alluding to my poor mother's fortune? Oh, how could you hesitate for an instant? Take every farthing of it which can be of use to you, for you know what belongs to me is also yours to do with it as you like.

"Alas! That can no longer help me, it is already lost!" said the director hoarsely. She looked at him in terror. Had he really touched that which belonged of right to her? Probably he was now suffering from remorse, and indeed she could not but feel that he had been wrong; but youth is generous, and Nora was especially so. She pressed her arms still more tenderly around his neck and said—

"Don't let that distress you, papa darling! you were free to do with it as you chose. But do tell me how I can help you?"

The director raised his head as if to shake off some heavy weight, and said reflectively to himself—

"After all, you could not have married him, and so it's better as it is."

"What do you mean, father?" cried Nora anxiously, and with a slight shudder. "Are you talking about Curt? That *he* would not have married me because I was poor? Oh, believe me! he never gave a thought to that."

"I wanted to build a golden bridge between you and the man you had set your foolish heart upon; I was ready to break completely off with you, so that you might have the happiness you had dreamt of; indeed, I did it against my better judgment, but I did it! And now the bridge is broken down. You are now, not only the horsebreaker's daughter, but that of the swindler and of the liar."

"Father!" exclaimed Nora with anguish, "you have been suffering, and are still under the impression of your suffering. Curt is good, and will be fair in his judgment of you. Believe me, if he has loved me enough to surmount

all other difficulties, he will not stop at money—only money!"

"Only money!" repeated the director satirically; "he can't do without it all the same. You have brought enough unpleasantness upon him as it is, and now you will cost him his property, as well as his position. A fine sort of love which exacts so many sacrifices!"

At this last taunt Nora stood up. She was as pale as death, and pressed her hand to her heart, as if to prevent its breaking.

The director also rose. Now, that she was evidently beginning to oppose him, he must work himself up into resistance.

"I should like to know what you are waiting for," he cried violently; "perhaps that he should take back his word, and throw off the yoke you have laid upon his shoulders? Isn't it sufficient that he should have proved to you that he thought no distance too great to put between you and him? Is it not sufficient that his family should avoid you as the plague? or, will you take your father's ruin as a pretext for going a-begging to Degenthal for his love, and to his family for their pity?"

This outburst did not seem to shake Nora. She raised her eyes quietly up to her father, and said: "Curt was here a month ago; he came all the way from the East only in order to assure me of his fidelity and of his love. And oh! I *do* believe in him with all my soul!"

"Really! So he sneaks secretly to you, because he does not choose to recognise you openly! and you call *that* love, and you find *that* sufficient! Is that all the pride which your education has given you? The humblest woman of our troop would not endure such treatment from her lover. But you only listen to the suggestions of your blind passion, and all the rest is indifferent to you."

"O father, father!" said the poor taunted girl, "why

are you so hard upon me? Tell me rather how I can help you, and you will not find me indifferent. I will never do anything to retain Curt, if it be for his happiness that he should forget me, but do tell me what I can do for you."

The director made a few turns in the room.

"I wonder how much your fine words are to be relied upon," he said harshly. And then stopping suddenly and facing her, he added: "Prove yourself to be worthy of calling yourself Karsten's child!"

Nora stared at him blankly, without understanding his meaning.

"Save him from ruin," continued the director. "You can do so by appearing in public; and with your talents you will have the whole world at your feet. If you consent to this, I shall in a few months regain all that I have lost."

Nora continued to stare at him in a helpless sort of way, as if he were speaking a foreign tongue which she could not understand.

"You are the most accomplished artist I know of in our line," he began again, perceiving that she did not speak. "You will be a new and fresh element; such a one as the world has not seen for years. You have inherited it from me," he continued, waxing quite enthusiastic at the thought. "Nature meant you to shine thus, when she gifted you with this great and daring beauty of yours. You will outdo them all, as was prophesied of you in your childhood."

Suddenly a light broke upon her.

"Never, never!" she cried in an almost unearthly tone, hiding her face in her hands. "Never! that can never be!"

"I thought as much," said he, turning coldly from her. "Your way of loving is a strangely selfish one; you can sacrifice nothing either to your father or to your lover."

"Father, I will do anything for you but that! I will work for you, and stay by you, and not forsake you in your poverty . . . No other thought will make me faithless to my self-imposed task, but don't ask me to do that!"

"And *that* is the only thing which can help me," said Karsten, pushing her roughly away from him. "All the rest are useless and empty words; but I thought as much. I felt sure that you would keep your pride and leave your father to his fate."

"But, indeed, father, I can do something better," she said imploringly. "I have learnt a good deal, and God has given me talents which I can turn to account; I will look out for a situation, and all I earn shall be for you."

"The few thalers you would earn thus would not be of much use to me," he said with a harsh and bitter laugh. "For God's sake, spare me such high-flown speeches!"

"Remember how my mother was always against it."

"Your mother would have stood by me in every difficulty, and would have sacrificed everything to me," he answered, eluding the remark. "She also broke off with a great deal in order to be mine, and to share that position which you despise. How can a word from her, spoken in such totally different circumstances, have more weight with you than your father's shame?"

Nora had thrown herself on to the floor and knelt at her father's arm-chair, as if thus imploring a merciful God not to lay the cross too heavily upon her shoulders. It was a death-like agony she was going through, and yet something whispered to her that she owed it to Curt and to herself not to give way. "Oh, rather die, rather die!" she muttered.

"And if I implored you to do it?" said her father,

suddenly laying his hand upon her head. "Understand me well! I am lost unless you do this for me."

"Rather die! rather die!" she repeated unconsciously, as if those were the only words which her agonised heart could utter.

"Yes, rather die than bend one's pride. . . . You may be right," he said in a changed tone, and without one word more he left the room.

CHAPTER XV.

T was some time before Nora noticed that her father had left her. Her hands pressed before her face, she ıained in her kneeling posture—broken down, inani-ate—she knew not for how long. She tried to recall ɜr father's words, but they seemed so confused, so diffi-ılt to understand, that she gave the attempt up in ɜspair. One thought alone took shape and form in ɜr mind, and that was that she must remain firm ɜfore every prayer and every temptation, and that no ɔwer on earth should induce her thus to debase herself. here arose in her a deep indignation against her father ho had supposed her capable of consenting to such a ıing. How could this thought have crossed his mind? Who could have whispered such treasonable advice into is ear? Her secret instinct told her that Landolfo had ɜen at work in the affair. But enough of that! She ould not waste her thoughts upon the whys and where-ɔres; but would only try to imagine how this dreadful ıisfortune could be avoided. There came over her an nmense longing for advice and sympathy, and she knew ıe could find both in the man she loved.

This was certainly an event which would excuse her reaking through the prohibition of communicating with

him. The very idea of writing to him soothed her. She moved to go to her room, for she heard steps on the staircase, and a voice calling her. She disappeared softly through a side door, in order to avoid meeting any one at such a moment. As soon as she had reached her room a loud knock was heard at the door, and, before she had time to inquire who the intruder was, Landolfo stood before her with an agitated and perturbed countenance.

"Miss Nora, you here?" he asked hastily. "And your father, where is he?"

Nora drew herself proudly up, and looked in cold astonishment at the unwelcome visitor. But he stood his ground firmly, and something in his voice forced her into listening to him.

"Where is your father?" he cried again. "I know that he has been with you, for he had important matters to discuss with you. Did you satisfy him? In what mood did he leave you?"

Nora stared at him as if in a dream, and only shook her head silently.

"Ah, ah! So that's the position of affairs, is it?" said Landolfo ironically. "You have sent your father away without giving him even this drop of comfort. Uncommonly touching! You don't seem to be aware that men, who stand on the brink of ruin, are capable of anything. Once more, Miss Nora, where is the director?"

Nora turned deadly pale, and laid her hand on her forehead, as if trying to gather her scattered thoughts. "I don't know, I don't know," she stammered. "What do you mean? What are you alluding to?" Then, suddenly, as if the power of thought had returned to her, she added hastily, "We must look for him directly. He went out into the garden after our conversation."

"Into the garden? What direction did he take? He surely did not go alone?" inquired Landolfo in a rough

tone. "Mrs. Karsten and I naturally thought you were together. We could not suppose that you would have left your father to himself in the hour of misfortune. Anyhow the consequences rest upon your head!"

"My God! My God!" Yes; she understood now what he meant; and before her eyes arose the images of those poor wretches she had read about, who had preferred death to ruin. And had not her father's last words been "Rather die!"

She flew like a hunted deer across the many windings of the park, calling loudly, "Father, father." Almost unwittingly that certain spot near the stream forced itself upon her mind with fearful tenacity. The slippery soil, the rotten bridge, the broken branches, and the deep bed of the stream—she tried not to think of them, and yet could think of nothing else.

"Do you really think that your father was on his way to the town?" asked Landolfo breathlessly, as she suddenly took the short cut which led there across the wood. "He knew that I was there."

"It's possible all the same . . . There's a bridge, you know, which leads across to the road," said Nora, trying to subdue her own fears. But suddenly it seemed to her as if her feet had turned to lead, so difficult was it to raise them, and her eyes opened with a staring wildness, as she tried clearly to distinguish what she saw before her.

"Stay here, stay here, Miss Nora!" said Landolfo, seizing her violently by the arm. "That is no place for you."

But Nora tore herself away from his grasp, and rushing forward fell upon her knees in a state of blind despair. Her worst expectations seemed to have been realised; her instinct had led her surely. A dark form lay stretched out in the water, whilst the head alone rested upon a stone; the smallest movement, and the water which

flew rapidly along, would have carried the body away. Had he intended to cross the bridge, and, his foot slipping, fallen in? Had a sudden giddiness caused his fall? Or had it been of his own will that he now lay there, and Providence's mercy had saved him at the last moment?

Nora, hardly conscious of what she was doing, helplessly tried to draw the inanimate form to herself. But Landolfo had already joined her, and said in a commanding tone: "Be calm! I entreat of you to be calm!" But his own face was livid, and showed how far from being calm he himself was. Cold sweat stood upon his forehead, and his teeth chattered in his head. With a firm grasp, however, and considerable adroitness, he raised the body, and placed the head carefully upon Nora's lap.

"He is not dead," he said, after having placed his hand upon the poor man's heart, "he has only fainted." So saying, he heaved a deep sigh of relief. "Unloose the comforter about his neck and rub his pulses as hard as you can," he continued to Nora, "whilst I go to the town for a doctor. Remember that the bridge broke under him," he said significantly, as he destroyed with his foot the last remnants of the decayed planks of the bridge.

Nora hardly heard what Landolfo said, nor saw what he did. She mechanically obeyed him, whilst the one dreadful thought kept gnawing at her heart: Had she forced her father to this awful determination? Had she repelled him so harshly that he had been led to think this the only way of escaping from ruin and from shame? Her refusal to comply with his wish now seemed a monstrous act of cruelty to her.

"It has all happened through my fault," she repeated with tremulous lips. "Father, father, don't die! In the name of pity, don't die! I will do anything and everything for your sake! Father, I solemnly swear to do as you wish," she whispered to the unconscious man, in a

persuasive tone, as if she thought he must hear her, and be called back to life again.

Was it only the change of position, or was it the voice of his child and her warm breath, which caused a slight shiver to pass through his body and a gentle sigh to break through his tightly-closed lips?

Nora clasped her hands together in a prayer of thanksgiving and of entreaty.

"Don't let him die! Oh, my Saviour, don't let him die through my fault! The sacrifice of my whole life shall expiate this moment, cost what it may!" And as she then spoke, she pressed a little cross which she wore round her neck upon his blanched lips. "I will think nothing too much in order to save you, father." And, indeed, it seemed to her as if the sacrifice of her own life was the only price with which she could buy her father's.

Landolfo now returned, accompanied by two or three men with a litter. To Mrs. Karsten he had only said that her husband had sprained his ankle in the wood, and that he, therefore, required help in order to carry him home. To the men, the broken remnants of the bridge rendered no other explanation necessary.

The director was carefully placed upon the litter, and Nora did not let go of his hand. As soon as the slightest movement was perceptible upon his face, she whispered her consent to his wish softly in his ear, as if she feared that his soul might depart before learning that she had accomplished her duty to him as a daughter.

It seemed to her as if a light suddenly shot from his eyes, and as if he had understood her meaning, and once even, she thought, that he had pressed her hand ever so slightly.

The hours which followed were full of anguish to her, and yet Mrs. Karsten was rendered so completely powerless by agitation that Nora was forced to work herself

up to the highest pitch of energy and of self-possession. It was appalling to see how calmly she undertook everything, not neglecting the most apparently insignificant directions of the doctor. The latter declared that the director had suffered from a slight attack of apoplexy, and that his state had been made worse by the time he had spent in the water. During a few days he hovered between life and death. Nora never left his side, neither by day nor by night; she did not speak, she did not complain, she did not weep; she accomplished even the slightest of her duties as nurse—but for everything else she seemed turned to stone.

When the consciousness of the sick man had returned, he did not in any way allude to the past, nor did a word about his accident cross his lips. He seemed agitated and pained as his senses gradually came back to him, and his eyes sought Nora's with a look partly shy, partly anxious. But Nora would not be heroic by halves, so that she sought at once to give the tired brain immediate rest and satisfaction. Kneeling at his bedside and embracing him tenderly, she whispered to him the promise which she had made in the first hour of her despair, and which, since then, she had often repeated inwardly to herself.

It was strange to mark the effect of these words upon the convalescent man. At first he looked sceptically, then wonderingly at her, and at last a childlike joy passed across his wan features. He pressed his daughter's hand to his shoulder and said, "Then I have not only dreamt this; it was not a mere phantom who came to tell me that you would save me . . . . Nora, Nora; I knew that you would be my own good child, that you would not forsake me in my distress . . . . And now your old father need not give up his beautiful horses—his pride, his fame, without which he cannot live.

"O Nora! that will be pleasant! You will put the

other one completely aside; we will be all in all to each other as in the good old times when you were a little girl and enjoyed nothing more than being placed upon a horse by your father. Do you remember that still, Nora? . . . . And then they came and tried to separate my little girl from me; but you are like your mother, and will leave everything for me."

"Everything!" gasped Nora, and there must have lain a deep anguish in the word, for it seemed to awake the sick man out of his joyful trance.

"You would never have been happy with him, my girl," he went on, smoothing her soft hair compassionately. "You would have been indescribably miserable. I know the world; they would have always hated you for having, as it were, forced yourself upon them, and he would at last have repented of his choice and have neglected you. And that, you know, would have been a thousand times more bitter and hard to bear than this moment. Believe me, my child, it is for your good, and I am only saving you from great unhappiness." And as the director sank back exhausted upon his pillows, he was quite convinced of the truth of what he had said. There is no orator more eloquent and more persuasive to a man than the voice of his own selfishness.

Nora laid her tired head by the side of that of her father, whilst he held her fingers tightly grasped, as if he feared she might escape him.

"Everything!" she again whispered to herself, and the whole magnitude of the sacrifice arose before her. Her love killed at a blow, her position destroyed, her happiness a myth, and her hopes blasted. All this fell upon her heart heavily, so heavily that she felt ready to cry aloud under the weight of the burden.

Had her father in his half somnolence the remotest idea of what his child was suffering? "She won't do it,

she won't do it, Landolfo," . . . he said, in a broken tone.

"Yes, she will do it," repeated Nora firmly. Then, however, she arose, and gently disengaging her hand from his, she called the nurse, and for the first time since many days and nights she went to her room. It seemed to her as if she were some other person, very different from her former self, and everything around her seemed strange and new.

Upon her writing-desk lay the letter to Curt she had only had time to begin. The words stared at her, like ghosts, in an uncanny sort of way, and reminded her of what she had intended to write to him. And now it was all past, and she must write something else, something quite different. She hastily tore the paper in two. Something must be done and done at once, and although her eyes were burning from her late vigils, and her heavy eyelids were nearly closed with fatigue, she sat down and wrote—all as in a dream.

What did she write? Later on, she hardly knew herself; but it was a clear and graphic description of all the hours, of all the days which had passed since that dreadful moment in which her father had first asked her, as a matter of course, to give up her happiness to him. It struck her at the time that she was writing for some one else. Surely the suffering was too great for her to understand, and it was only at the end of her letter that she was overcome by the realisation of her dreadful woe. It sounded forth in her last words of farewell, for they brought home to her the depth and darkness of the abyss which henceforth separated her from him. It did not cross her mind for a second to consider their engagement otherwise than broken off for ever.

"As one dying, do I part from you, Curt! As one dying, and who is not even sure of salvation. Curt, I

durst not take the hand which you, perhaps, will hold out to me. Oh! had you been here, you might have found a way to save me from misery! Thus, alone, I only saw one thing before me, and that was to do my duty at every cost. May the sacrifice which I now make expiate any error I may have committed in making it. I could not act otherwise. Farewell, Curt!"

The pen fell out of her hand and her head sank upon the table, as if she were incapable of thought or action; but yet her mind was at work, nor could it rest even for a moment after so fearful a storm. Was she, perhaps, regretting that she was no longer the little child who had sobbed out her first grief in the arms of that bright and bonnie lad? Did she see her pale and agonising mother before her as that lad had carried the child to her bedside? Did she still feel the feverish hand which had pushed her away from that lad into her father's arms?

"Mother! mother! did you wish that it should be so?" she cried out aloud, and a torrent of tears fell from her eyes. "Am I to belong completely to my father? Well. then, if you wished it, it has been done; I have signed myself away to him with my very heart's blood. Now, come, and bless your child!"

There was a drop of comfort, something like a whispered blessing which came upon her at that moment; it was the drop of comfort, it was the blessing which comes to every sacrifice, to every pure and complete act of good-will.

Nora lay there still, until the grey morning-dawn broke into her room, when she was summoned to her father.

Before her lay her finished letter. Whither should she direct it? She could think of nothing, nor remember anything very exactly. At Curt's last visit they had determined not to break through orders any more, and to wait patiently until the two years of trial

should have elapsed. He had, therefore, not told her his address, and she could not bear to think of her letter coming into strange hands.

"I will send it to his mother's care, and she may forward it on—she may see it if she likes. It will give her pleasure, for it is the only letter she would like him to receive from me," she added bitterly.

CHAPTER XVI.

ANDOLFO had attained his object sooner than he had hoped. That he had represented matters in a worse ght than that in which they stood, was his own secret. is consequent emotion upon seeing how tragically his little medy might have ended was, therefore, anything but put ı. But his conscience was not delicate enough to torment m long with remorse, especially when he saw that every- ing had happened according to his wishes.

It was his sincere conviction that Nora's appearance in ıblic was the only thing which could save the director om ruin; and, last not least, be favourable to his own ojects.

"After a few years, our haughty beauty will have got customed to me, and will no longer treat me as a dog," thought to himself, and already he rubbed his hands, entally, at the brilliant position he would occupy as irector Karsten's son-in-law and manager of the whole oop. His principal occupation now was to draw as uch advantage as possible out of the present state of fairs, and he set everything in motion not only with a ew to render it impossible for Nora to change her mind, ıt also that the public might be worked up into a proper ate of interest and curiosity. He was well acquainted

with the manner of pulling the secret strings, and of directing the petty intrigues necessary to prepare the road for such an artist.

Nora was still at her father's bedside when paragraphs appeared about her in the most popular papers; the penny-a-liners made themselves very busy with her name. One day it was her beauty and her education, another her love story which was retailed with the most manifold variations, now and then, indeed, coming so near the truth, that one might almost have filled up the apparently discreet blanks with well-known names; but sometimes so improbable that people believed what was said on that very account. The pecuniary difficulties of the director were also alluded to, and Nora was presented to the public under the various and attractive forms of a forsaken and broken-hearted beauty, of a heroic daughter, and of a passionate votary to horsemanship.

All the paragraphs were read, discussed, and believed in. Karsten was a European celebrity, and it was thought interesting to catch glimpses of his private life. Of course, the darker and the more astounding the story, the more favour did it meet with. It must be admitted that a third part of those who read the papers skip the account of political events in order to devour items of gossip, and when they sniff scandal they rejoice, and read the paragraph over two or three times. Besides, just then the world was in a state of political torpor, such as it now and then falls into, and gossip was more welcome than usual; everybody was anxious to see the renowned beauty, of whom every paper wrote, each one ignoring the while that these various versions all emanated from the same pen and the same fertile brain.

In order to be on the safe side, Landolfo cut out these paragraphs and sent them to Countess Degenthal. The latter had long ago received Nora's letter to her son, and had

felt indignant that her commands should be violated in so flagrant a manner; but she had not thought it her duty to forward the letter on to Curt. After receiving Landolfo's packet, she concluded that the letter had to do with this new aspect of affairs, though she hardly knew whether to be pleased or indignant at the fact that a person whom her son had deigned to love should be thus brought before the public. Of course, she did not think for a moment that Nora had any excuse for having acted thus, and even an irrefutable proof that the whole was an invention would not have altered the case in her eyes. A name which had thus been dragged into the mud could no longer be spoken in the same breath as that of her son. She now thought it quite justifiable to retain the letter until she had made sure of the truth of the report. . . . She had not to wait long.

. . . . . .

Days went by; the director recovered more rapidly than might have been expected, and was now possessed with the one idea of bringing out his daughter upon the scene of his own former triumphs. He had placed all his hopes in this, and calmed all his anxieties with the thought.

Nora was to appear as soon as possible and in the most brilliant manner imaginable, for he wished to be master of the position before his rival had reached the capital. Thus it was that hardly three weeks had passed after the director's accident, when huge play-bills were pasted about on all the walls of the capital of North Germany, upon which were printed in large letters that the celebrated beauty, Miss Nora Karsten, would soon make her appearance in her father's renowned circus. Then followed the various wonders which, according to the programme, were to astonish the public.

Even the countess, prepared as she was, turned pale on reading one of these bills which Landolfo, of course, sent her. Something like compassion for the poor girl made

its way through her rigid common sense to her heart. She remembered those pure and noble features, expressive of distinction and of higher education, and so completely devoid of frivolity. She wondered what could have brought her to anything so contrary to her nature. But, however it might have taken place, the deed was done, and with it a great load was taken off the countess's mind. She was now armed with unanswerable proofs, and could not be accused by her son of having given heed to vain reports. She was too honest to destroy Nora's letter, but she did not send it alone; she packed it with the paragraphs in the folds of the large play-bill.

"My poor son," she wrote, "I can no longer conceal from you that which the whole world knows. It will cause you to awake from a dream which your mother's experienced eye had long ago judged an impossible and an unworthy one. Do not sorrow too deeply over the bare truth; it is the privilege of pure and of noble souls to believe easily, and now and then their misfortune to err in their belief. I bless God that it has happened soon enough not to mar the happiness of your whole life. Come to your mother's arms, seek comfort in her heart, and you may be sure that you will receive it."

It was a matter of small importance, no doubt, that the countess should place Nora's letter so that it should be the last to catch her son's eyes. But life is made up of unimportant details, and the greatest effects are often wrought by the most insignificant causes. Did the countess make this reflection as she carefully weighed the packet before sending it to the post? Perhaps she did, and perhaps she considered it part of her duty towards her son to have arranged it thus.

At the same hour in which the countess had her letter and its contents posted, Nora stood in the small dressing-room of the circus, dressed for her first appearance. Her

step-mother knelt at her side with a few attendants, and gave the last touch to the heavy folds of the dark riding-habit, which, simple and well-fitting, displayed her beautiful figure to advantage. Numerous candles were burning by the mirror which reflected her beauty, her severe beauty only relieved by a golden net which imprisoned the lovely masses of her raven hair. Nora would not hear of wearing any other than the simple riding-habit she was accustomed to, nor did she even look at herself in the glass, or pay any attention to the many people who were occupied about her. She stood there as in a dream, her cold hands tightly pressed together. As in a dream she had lived through all this time, in which days succeeded each other mechanically and enveloped, as it were, by a mist.

Her father had had tact enough to spare her all the trouble of the preparations. She had resumed her daily exercises on horseback, and the fatigue she felt after them had been the only thing which had done her any good.

And yet she had hoped for something, reckoned with certainty upon something which never came, so that each day had brought a fresh disappointment, and that she now felt as if the last plank had given way under her. Even at this moment she stood expectantly, hoping against hope that something would come and prevent her taking the last step. Young hearts have such a capacity for hope, you know!

She had, it is true, taken a last farewell from Curt, and had herself destroyed every chance of arresting herself on the road to her ruin—and yet, and yet! Perhaps help would come just in time to save her before it was irrevocably too late. Surely if he had dared so much for one single hour of happiness, what would he not dare now that her whole life was at stake? Every morning she

had said to herself: "To-day, to-day a letter will come!" and every evening she had found some fresh excuse, some plausible reason for the day having passed by without bringing anything from Curt.

A sound of applause now fell upon her ear, and with it ended the scene which preceded her own appearance. The director entered to fetch her away. A knock was heard at the door, and a servant brought in a letter.

Nora's whole frame was seized with trembling, and the director grew pale; but at the same moment Nora let the paper fall indifferently at her feet, for upon it she had recognised the handwriting of the Superior, who had answered her by return of post, true to her old friendship and motherly interest. But, alas! what is friendship when compared with love?

"It is time," said the director almost hesitatingly.

But Nora was trembling from head to foot, and seemed hardly able to move a step.

The director saw his hopes dashed to the ground, and asked in a hoarse voice: "Can't you do it? Won't it be possible?"

"Yes, it will," said Nora, drawing herself up at the sound of his voice, which had only once before sounded in so unearthly a manner upon her ears. "Yes, my father, it will be possible," and she followed him with a firm step.

Landolfo's exertions had, it must be owned, been crowned with success. The large arena was filled as it had hardly ever been filled before; every one had been determined to catch the first sight of the renowned beauty. The director had prepared everything with the greatest possible brilliancy, so that his daughter should appear with a certain *nimbus*.

The grooms, in their smartest livery, were all attending upon her, and little boys, dressed up in the most bewitch-

ing costumes as pages, stood at the entrance of the course, waiting to usher in their mistress.

As she now entered, a storm of applause followed upon the silence of expectation. With one leap the beautiful Amazon was in the middle of the arena, and her horse and herself remained for a second motionless, so that they both seemed cut out of marble.

From the box occupied by the young men there followed considerable excitement. Each one arose and stepped forward in order to take a better view of her. In this place they had, indeed, never seen so beautiful a woman, so noble an attitude, so sweet and innocent an expression.

The fiery animal now raised itself so high that it seemed incomprehensible how the Amazon kept her seat so firmly. And now the music struck in with the light and soft tones which generally accompany such a performance. The horse flew and danced gracefully about, and evolution followed upon evolution, directed by so sure and so firm a hand, and executed with such unmistakeable ease, that "Bravo!" upon "Bravo!" accompanied the charming scene. The *connoisseurs* did not find words enough with which to praise such perfect talent.

Meanwhile the music became gradually quicker and wilder; the measure more exciting; the horse, as if animated by success, snorted across the course, flying at one leap over the obstacles placed upon its road. The excitement was gaining the lookers-on. Every eye was fixed upon the daring Amazon, whose face remained so still, whose eye shot forth no glimmer of satisfaction, and whose expression seemed to be that of one turned to stone, and totally unconscious of the rows of spectators, whose whole attention and admiration were centred upon her. And now, one high leap across the closed barrier, and she was gone as suddenly as she had come.

The pent-up feelings of the public vented themselves

in one mighty storm of applause, such as had not been heard for years in that circus.

The beautiful enigmatical woman had completely charmed every one, and Landolfo might well rub his hands with satisfaction. A thousand voices repeatedly cried out the traditional "Fuori! Fuori!" in hopes that she would appear once more, but her father presented himself alone. His voice trembled as he thanked the public for the approval his daughter had met with, but, he added, she was so overcome by her first appearance in public that she was quite unable to thank them in person for the applause bestowed upon her.

The speech was so far a happy one, that it reminded all present of the interesting and romantic reports which had surrounded Nora with so much mysterious charm.

This *début* had assured her success, but whilst her name was in every mouth, and young swells drank to her in sparkling champagne, calling her "The New Star!" and adding some spicy word upon this circus beauty, Nora was lying pale and still upon her couch.

The bodily and mental emotions she had gone through now asserted their right; indeed, she was too much exhausted to feel great pain.

One fearful ghost alone, the ghost of her past happiness, arose before her, and told her that all was over, that this evening was irrevocably inscribed upon the annals of her life, and that, do what she would, she could never wash away its stain. With it she had taken farewell to the set she belonged to in mind and heart. Once more her limbs shook with a nervous tremor, and her eyes would not close in sleep.

She mechanically held out her hand towards the letter her kind friend had written her, and mechanically read the touching words of comfort it contained.

"My poor child," wrote the good nun, "the Lord lead

you to Him by strange and rough roads. A pure intention sanctifies, and a great sacrifice explains everything; thus even your determination which would otherwise be inexplicable to me. Perhaps this mode of life is better for your soul than the one we had dreamt of for you, and which, to our short-sightedness, seemed to place you so safely above all danger. My own heart's child, whatever you may be, you are dearer to me than ever; let us love each other—more even than in the old times! I follow you in mind wherever you go, and pray God that He may protect and defend you."

And so friendship crossed the barrier which love could not surmount. Nora read this one passage over and over again: "A pure intention sanctifies, and a great sacrifice explains everything." Her last thought that night was: "Will Curt think as she does, and not despise me? Oh, he need not fear; I will show him that I shall not sink even upon this road. My love will keep my courage firm and high."

Whilst these events were taking place at home, Curt, who had not the faintest idea of them, was thoroughly enjoying the beauties of the East. Ever since his heart was at rest, he had felt that he could bear and forbear, for he knew that neither in his love nor in that of Nora a change was possible. Only a short year and a half, and he would take her to his heart before the whole world as his own fair bride.

It was his intention, in order to escape from all the difficulties which would necessarily arise immediately after his marriage, to remain attached to his foreign post for a few years, and then, rich in experience and in remembrances, return to his country, there to work on its soil.

It all seemed so simple and clear now, and life offered itself to him in the most varied forms of outward enjoy-

ment and of inward content, so that he often let his thoughts rest upon it in ecstasy. His mind was organised for a higher field of action than that contained in the narrow horizon of his own individual circumstances; and he felt that with Nora he could spread out its wings and enjoy dear liberty. For the present, he turned his whole interest towards the country and the people he was living amongst, and he thoroughly enjoyed visiting all those sights which are sacred to science or full of pious memories. He thus spent much of his time making excursions in the neighbourhood, often remaining a few weeks absent.

He had just returned from one of these interesting tours, and presented himself before his chief, who gave him a whole packet of letters which had that day arrived for him. "Quite a volume!" said the old gentleman, smiling good-naturedly as he gave him the packet with his mother's handwriting. "Ah, yes! Young men rejoice at getting letters, whilst we old ones tremble beforehand at what their contents may bring. Life has not much good news for us. . . . But now go and study your home-chronicle."

Curt went, and was joined at the door of the Embassy by a young French colleague, who walked home with him, being, as he declared, just on the way to calling at his rooms. With French animation and loquacity, he chattered on so rapidly that he did not notice how preoccupied Curt was. The unusually large envelope made him feel anxious, he hardly knew the reason why.

Arrived at his rooms, Curt threw the parcel impatiently down upon the table, so that the Frenchman with characteristic tact at once said:

"Ah! Letters from your country, I see! Pardon! I ought not to have disturbed you, *cher comte.* Pray satisfy your curiosity, whilst I wander about the beautiful realm

of flowers you have here. I am somewhat of a botanist," he added, and entered at once into the conservatory which adorns every apartment in Pera, and where fresh green leaves, the scent of flowers, and the gentle splashing of a fountain, compensate for the unpleasant smells which reign in the streets.

"My mother seems to be studying from the Press," cried Curt's voice merrily after him. "Stay, dear vicomte, the parcel only contains bits of newspapers and advertisements; come and have a cigar first."

The vicomte did not come at once; he was lost in admiration before a plant which was new to him. Suddenly a strange and agonising cry of pain made him rapidly turn. Through the open glass-doors he could see Curt, his head sunk upon the table and his arms spread out before him, as if he had suddenly fainted. The open letter lay at his feet, and in his hand was a newspaper which he still unconsciously clutched.

"Count! for God's sake! What is the matter with you?" cried the Frenchman, rushing to his friend's side.

A second cry of anguish burst from the poor fellow's breast, but his head still lay heavily upon the table, so that the features were not discernible.

"Degenthal! I beseech of you, do be calm!" said the vicomte. "Have you had any bad news? Are you ill? Shall I call your servant?"

Curt slightly moved his hand with a deprecating gesture. "Only a headache, a little giddiness . . . the heat . . . please, fetch me some water."

The vicomte rushed out and dipped his handkerchief in the fountain in order to place it upon the sufferer's head. He had only required a minute to do this in; but when he returned, the newspaper-cuttings had disappeared.

"It was a sharp and horrible pain which suddenly seized hold of me," said Curt, supporting his head on his hand whilst the vicomte pressed the wet handkerchief to his forehead. "I evidently over-tired myself during this last tour."

The polite Frenchman did not contradict him, but he remembered that Curt had not looked in the least over-tired when he had met him at the Embassy, and he consequently came to the conclusion that some piece of bad news had thus overpowered him. Anyhow, he did not wish to communicate his sorrow, that was evident, and so he wisely asked no more questions.

"Your forehead is burning," he said, after a few moments of silence, during which Curt stared unconsciously before him. "I strongly advise you to go to bed and to send for the doctor. In this climate there is no joking with such symptoms."

"I think I shall soon be better," said Curt, staggering with difficulty to his feet. "Does the fever of this country make one delirious?" he asked.

"It depends," said the Frenchman with a smile; "but I hope it will not come to that if you take care of yourself at once."

"Oh, perhaps a regular attack of raging fever would do one more good than harm," said Curt as if to himself. "One often feels as if one had been delirious all one's life . . . excuse me, vicomte, I feel that I am wretched bad company . . . A doctor, you think? I'd rather not, but *visits;* oh, keep them away! I hate them so when I am ill!"

"As you choose, you stubborn German! But now allow me to send at once for the doctor. Your interdiction of visits does not extend to me, I hope."

The Frenchman had spoken with his accustomed volubility; and he was not quite sure that he had been under-

stood, for Curt was staring before him with a fixed and absent look.

Taking up his hat, the vicomte hurried away to fetch the doctor. He had hardly gone a few steps, when he heard his name called out, and turning, he saw Curt who had followed him with faltering steps.

"My dear fellow," he said hastily, "please render me a service. This letter must be at once sent to the post . . . it is . . . it is evidently," he said stammering, "not meant for me. It must be sent back," he added impatiently.

He gave him the letter, upon which the words "Deutschland retour" were written in a trembling hand. The vicomte promised to do as he wished.

"You must, however, go to bed," he said again anxiously, for Curt's evident agitation began seriously to alarm him. "Let me go back with you."

Curt thanked him and hastened back alone.

The Frenchman followed him with his eyes, and then, looking at the letter, he shook his head, for the handwriting was unmistakeably that of a lady. "I am strangely mistaken if a *belle dame* is not as usual at the bottom of it," he thought to himself; "evidently her missive has not been received with pleasure. Not even opened! That's a sort of thing one ought never to do in a moment of over-excitement. Who knows if he would not give a great deal later on to have read that letter? But those Germans are so pig-headed! Anyhow, let us do as he wishes. *Ah, les femmes, les femmes!* They always have a finger in the pie when a misfortune happens," and the little vicomte heaved a deep sigh, as much as to say that he also had had his experience in that quarter.

If poor Nora had waited many a weary long week without one word from Curt, whilst her letter lay quietly

in his mother's hands, it was now the countess's turn to taste of the bitter cup she had given another to drink. She had calculated exactly when her letter would reach Constantinople, and when she could receive an answer; but time passed and no letter came.

She wrote again and again, and gave herself up to the wildest conjectures. Ought she, perhaps, to have announced the event to him with more precaution? To have prepared him more gradually? Had she treated his love too lightly? Then her thoughts quite ran away with her, and she fancied he had placed himself in direct communication with Nora, and that, notwithstanding all, he would appear one day and present her as his wife. Anything seemed easier to bear than this dreadful silence. At last a letter came, but not from Curt. It was the old ambassador, who detailed to her in the most minute manner her son's illness. He supposed it to have been caused by the frequent and prolonged excursions Curt had undertaken in the interior of the country, and for which he had evidently overrated his strength. A pang shot across the mother's heart on reading the date of the day upon which he had fallen ill, as it accorded with the probable arrival of her letter.

She would have started off at once, had not the writer alluded to her son's positive wish that she should not undertake such a journey, and added that the doctors also thought it better that every kind of emotion should be avoided. Contrarily to her usual mode of proceeding, the countess did what she was told, and remained at home; for she well knew how agitating their meeting would be.

During many a week after the arrival of this first letter, the vicomte, who had entirely devoted himself to the care of his young colleague, sent Curt's mother a frequent and detailed account of the patient's state, which, somehow, seemed to make no progress.

A complete apathy had followed upon the brain-fever, and Curt seemed incapable of clear thought about anything. He never complained of pain, he alluded in no way to the past, named no one, and seemed to be completely calm—perhaps too calm. There was only one feeling which he expressed with energy, and that was a decided objection to receiving any news from home.

The most able doctors of the place had been called into consultation, and they had declared a change of air necessary. But his great weakness prevented the possibility of such a thing for a long time. It seemed as if all spirit of resistance, either mentally or bodily, was broken.

"He has evidently been unable to support the climate," said those who, as soon as Curt's illness was heard of, came to express their sympathy to the countess. The latter read upon every face how much they would have liked to ask her what on earth could have induced her to expose her only son to such useless danger. She received the expressed sympathy and the secret reproach with the same outward calm, and no one knew what she suffered the while. But her stately figure lost much of its roundness, and her brilliant black hair suddenly turned grey.

The summer was once more blooming out in all its fragrancy, when at last the news came that Curt would soon be well enough to leave Constantinople. The mother's heart naturally longed for her son, but not a word came from him.

It was again the kind and amiable Frenchman who wrote to her, as soothingly as he could, and announced to her that her son was not yet able to write himself. Moreover, he had made up his mind to undertake a long journey, to visit the countries which the doctors considered advisable that he should visit, and he hoped this

change of objects, as well as of air, would contribute to his complete recovery.

At first he would go to Greece, then to Sicily, and would probably spend the winter in Spain and in the south of France; "*Se rapprochant pourtant toujours de sa patrie et du cœur de sa mère.*" Thus concluded the Frenchman with a gracefully-turned phrase.

As the countess read this letter, a scalding tear stole down her cheek, and a silent agony came over the mother's heart, knowing as she did that her whole life's tenderness had rested upon this one head, and that, after all, she had done what she had thought was for the best. Gently, as an echo, did her soul hear again the words the nun had once spoken to her, "You might lose a son, instead of gaining a daughter."

But the countess was not one of those natures who give themselves up for a long time to self-reproach. She had acted according to what she considered her better judgment, and she looked upon all this as the necessary consequences of a painful duty;—she had lived through the one, she would live through the other. "He will get over it," she said to herself, and to others she explained: "It is necessary for his health that he should remain in southern climes for the present;" thus nipping off in the bud every expression of compassionate wonder.

She spoke to no one about it, not even to her true and kind friend, the chaplain. She had told him, in a few words, the change which had come over Nora's destiny, and when, to his sorrow and surprise, he had found that, indeed, she had entered upon this new course of life, he had submitted to facts without being able to solve the problem.

About the same time a letter from the Superior arrived.

"I owe it to Nora to give you a word of explanation," she wrote, "as to the reasons which led the poor child to

enter upon so sad, and to her, so terrible a path. She offered up a beautiful act of sacrifice upon the altar of filial love, for which, may God take her mercifully under His protection! Do not judge her too harshly! I tell you this for justice's sake, and beg you also to tell it your son. I am certain, that if he be convinced his love was not given unworthily, and that he has not been deceived, it will help to soothe the pain of the wound which this sad event has certainly inflicted upon him. God's wisdom has led it thus; but the two young hearts have a bitter cup to drink."

The countess threw the letter impatiently down.

"The good creature must have lost her senses in her blind affection for the girl. Just at this moment, when he is on the point of getting well, it would be folly to bring his mind back to all these things! It is wonderful to see how unpractical even clever people can be, when they live completely away from the world, alone with their own thoughts. Poor Sybil! she is certainly very ridiculous with her romantic ideas."

The countess was so practical that the letter was at once thrown into the fire, the letter which might have contributed to the fulfilment of her dearest wish, that of once more finding the road to her son's heart.

CHAPTER XVII.

THREE years had passed by and had worked their change imperceptibly upon everything and everybody; upon Lily, too,—upon Lily with the round and rosy face—they had also left their mark. She was of age, and had entered into possession of her property.

Until then she had been under the guardianship of Countess Degenthal, a distant cousin, whom, however, she always called "Aunt," having contracted the habit in her childhood. The countess wished to continue exercising her trust until Lily had found a protector for life. But up to this time the heiress had refused every offer of marriage, to the inward satisfaction of the countess, who had not yet completely given up all hope of her first project succeeding, especially since destiny had caused such a change to take place in Nora's life. She attributed Lily's refusal of every proposal to the fact that the girl nurtured a secret affection for Curt. She was, therefore, all the more surprised and displeased when Lily suddenly announced her intention of henceforward living independently, under the chaperonage of an old relation, and of managing her property herself. But her home did not lie far from the Degenthal estate, and both were near the Austrian capital.

The countess could not make out what had induced

Lily to take such a step; but whether she understood it or not, she could not prevent the young lady doing as she chose. Albeit a gentle spirit, Lily had within her a certain power of resistance which nothing could break; and when she had set her mind upon a thing, she did it—quite quietly and simply. She was of age, and no observation to the contrary could move her to change that which she had long ago determined to do.

Since Curt's sudden departure, she had felt an almost unconscious antipathy for his mother; not that Lily thought the latter had wished to separate him from her; on the contrary, she knew how much the countess desired their union; but Lily had the notion that Curt's mother had been too imperious with him, and had thus caused him to leave his home, and that since then he had been unhappy. She knew nothing of the whys and wherefores, for the countess had not taken her into her confidence. Indeed, it was not Lily's nature to think deeply and much in general; but now that her otherwise narrow mind had seized hold of an idea, she would not let it go. She had liked Curt ever since her earliest childhood. His coldness and indifference had certainly pained her at one time, but that "cotillon" had served to drive all desponding reflections out of her head, and she was, moreover, conscious that she must be worth a great deal to him if one looked at the matter in a simply sensible point of view; and Lily was very sensible. She loved him, and she could wait.

She felt instinctively that to remain any longer with the countess would but estrange her still more from Curt. Besides, she was one of those who only feel really at ease upon their own domain. It requires a certain degree of imagination to enter into the mode of thinking of other people, to fathom them, and to see the good side of their minds and characters; small understandings generally feel

irritated at other people having different ideas and different characters from their own.

With her shy and timid manner, Lily had silently kept up an internal combat with her aunt during all the years they had spent together; and she had hastened to seize the first opportunity of gaining her liberty.

Notwithstanding her youth, she seemed more fitted for independence than most people even older than herself. She never did anything unusual, or at all out of the way, and one might feel quite sure that she would never overstep any of the barriers erected by decorum or common sense. Her household, her garden, her birds, her poor—these filled her day. She found everything in the best order when she entered into possession of her domain, so that she moved in it with all security. She had not, perhaps, a very large heart, and did not look at things in a broad comprehensive way, but she was very calm, and, meeting every one with a certain benevolence of manner, she carried her sceptre with some grace; and if anything were found wanting in her, it was attributed to her youth.

She was still termed "a bore" by young men, and old ones still found her "a model young lady," who would, in time, become a capital housewife. Young ladies made but little out of her; only mammas dreamt of that still and fair creature, so gentle and so shy, as an ideal daughter-in-law—a common, but no less great mistake; for narrow and obstinate minds are the least fitted for getting on well with their mothers-in-law.

To-day, however, the still fair face had been brought out of its usual quietness, and an unusually pink tint overspread her features. She had just received a letter from Curt who was on his way home at last, and who had announced his intention of paying a short visit to his cousin, her property being quite close to one of the stations he would have to pass by. This had caused great joy to

Lily, and her blue eyes had gained life and animation on reading the announcement. Her aunt said that he might arrive in a few days, so that the young hostess was, contrary to her custom, in a great state of excitement in order to make the necessary preparations. As a rule, she let all these things take their course and follow their usual routine.

Notwithstanding the many reasons alleged by her aged relation against such a proceeding, Lily gave orders that her pony carriage should be every day at the station, awaiting the possible arrival of the wished-for guest, and for all her other arrangements the one note was always: "Perhaps my cousin Curt may come;" a *viva voce* calculation unusual in one so silent as Lily.

Cousin Curt! Ay! How had he fared since that day when his mother's message had robbed him of every belief in love and in truth, and had killed that part of his life with one deadly blow?

He could hardly recall what he had felt when he had first held that crumpled playbill in his hand—that playbill upon which Nora's name—forsooth! was printed. It was a whirl, a storm of feeling which threatened to deprive him of his reason. There was the name so cruelly printed in large undeniable letters—and the sight of it thus, precipitated him from the greatest height of bliss to the lowest depth of misery. All that a man can feel of anger, of contempt, and of wounded pride, had fallen upon him and oppressed him in that moment. Had it been possible for him to *doubt*, he would have been saved from mental desolation. But how could he doubt with these letters staring at him so clearly, so distinctly, that when he was alone he cried out aloud in his wild despair. With a giant's strength, he had concealed all in his own heart, away from every stranger's eye, so that none should know of the pain or who had caused it.

As soon as his friend had left him he had sought to give himself a clear idea of what had happened—his mother's letter had confirmed and explained everything. His first thought was to destroy all the proofs of the shame and of the deception which had fallen upon him. No one should have the remotest idea of this dreadful disenchantment for which he thought himself deserving the sarcasm of the whole world. He found Nora's letter among the rest, and being seized with a fit of uncontrollable rage, he was on the point of destroying it also; but, on second thoughts, he considered it would be a greater revenge if he sent it back unopened, unread.

It was the last act he was conscious of. When the doctor came he found him stretched in a swoon upon the floor, and during weeks and months, as we have already said, the state of mental torpor continued. Of course, his illness was attributed to an over-excitement of nerves, caused by the climate. But his organisation was built upon feeling, and a fatal blow had been dealt to his love and to his faith in all that was good and noble. As the fever abated, he was still unable to move, his limbs being as if paralysed. During these long hours of forced and painful immobility, the remembrance of what had happened gradually returned to him. It often seemed as if the whole had been a horrible nightmare, a mere trick of an overworked imagination, a hideous offspring of fever. But no question upon the subject passed his lips. In his inward self he discussed the *pros* and *cons*, and felt a longing for an explanation; and yet he was so sure that all his doubts would only be confirmed by it, that he immediately put aside every missive from home. Whatever interest he had once been capable of gave way before the inward restlessness which seemed to consume all his vital forces. Not one word, however, not one look, betrayed him.

A few months after these events, his friend had tried to

divert him by an illustrated newspaper. He brought him one of those English periodicals which so faithfully represent all that may interest or amuse the world. Occasionally a faint smile had passed across Curt's lips on looking at some of the illustrations; and now the vicomte brought a particular number which contained a portrait of the great celebrity of the day: a lady following a somewhat adventurous career—Miss Nora Karsten, the beautiful and enchanting horsebreaker.

The Frenchman rejoiced when Curt held out his hand and asked for the paper; the doctors had strictly forbidden his reading anything exciting; and surely this could not possibly excite him at all. Curt looked fixedly at the portrait for some time, as if he wished to impress it upon his memory, then suddenly his face was convulsed, his head fell back, and he threw the paper away from him as if it were some venomous reptile, whilst his eyes bore that fixed expression which his friend had seen there once before. "A little over-tired," gasped Curt, as an explanation of this sudden attack; but during the same night he had a relapse, the cause of which puzzled the doctors extremely. Once more, however, youth won the day, as far as his physical strength was concerned, but his mental capacity seemed to have deserted him completely. He had no longer any doubt, he had no longer any wish for an explanation—everything in the past was dead, buried, and forgotten. She whom he had loved, and for whom he had been ready to sacrifice all, had dragged herself in the dust; she was dead to him, and his mind was empty and desolate as a land might be after devastation by fire and sword. The doctors, who were helpless before such complete giving way of all mental activity, advised change of air and of scene. Of course, he could not blame his mother for anything, but yet he could not forget that she had been the one to send him this message of death. Moreover, he

instinctively felt that she must be satisfied at all having happened as she had prophesied, and there is no doubt that Cassandras are no popular characters, especially when their forebodings of evil come right. Curt left Constantinople, and visited all the places he had been advised to visit in order to regain his health. A coarser nature than his would have given itself up to wild pleasures, and, indeed, had he been in good health, he would probably have fallen into the common mistake of trying to fill the void in his heart by the turmoil of the world. As it was, one feeling had constituted the centre of his existence, and the memory of the child he had loved, of the girl he had worshipped, filled his soul with bitterness, for she had proved herself false, and now he cared for nothing, and nothing charmed him.

There is only one thing which saves us in such moments, and that is the necessity of having to earn our livelihood, and to fight with the daily difficulties a similar necessity brings with it, and Curt had not this resource.

At last he gave way to his mother's entreaties, and was returning home, after a lapse of more than three years.

. . . . .

It was evening—a train was just going to leave a station on the frontier of Western Germany. It was one of those trains which fly across the Continent, and only stay any time at great capitals, as if smaller towns were scarcely worthy of notice. This train came from the French metropolis, and was hurrying on to the Austrian one, so that but a short stoppage was allowed. A young man, however, stepped leisurely across the platform, as one too accustomed to travel to be fussy about time, and asked for a first class *coupé*. Notwithstanding the golden argument which he pressed into the guard's hand, the latter shrugged his shoulders and declared that it was impossible to procure him

anything of the kind. The young man gave way to fate, and entered a carriage in which two ladies were already seated. The one opposite to him was an old woman with remarkably cut features, whose simple attire showed her to be a maid; her large head with her brown and wrinkled face were almost buried in a pillow, and she snored loudly. He could not catch a glimpse of the other traveller's face, for she was in the furthest corner from him, and the twilight had already set in. He could only see that she was dressed like a lady, as now and then the small head with its covering of lace bent forward to look at the view.

The young man was tired and somewhat *blasé;* yet he could not help glancing occasionally at the lady in the further corner of the carriage.

The shrill whistle announcing that it was time to start had been heard. The engine puffed and panted, screamed and shrieked, and the train moved on, the smoke forming successive ghostly figures in the tepid air of the summer night. Away, away, by thicket and wood, village and town; over dale, down hill, through rocks and across bridges, it went fuming along. Away, away, so rapidly that it left neither time for noticing the beauty of the present, nor for remembering the charms of the past, nor, indeed, for thought of any kind.

At length it slackened its pace, the engine's loud cry once more trembled through the air, and seemed to be heaving an unconscious sigh of relief at being freed from the curse of eternal locomotion. "Bonn Station!" called out the guard, putting his head in at the window of the carriage, and announcing a few minutes' stoppage. Bonn is a university town on the Rhine. The old woman slept on, but the two other passengers, as if moved by the same thought, started out of their dreamy rest. Unconsciously they both arose, and found themselves standing next to

each other in the narrow space of the carriage. . . . The light of the lamp falls upon both their faces, and as their eyes meet they stare at each other with a nameless, deadly terror. . . . For a moment it seems as if a cry would force itself from their lips, as if their hands would stretch out to clasp each other, as if a passing glow of happiness would lay itself on both their faces. But a deep and burning blush suffuses her forehead, and a dark cloud passes over his. Their lips are once more closed, their hands press tightly together, and the ray disappears to make room for icy coldness. . . . The two passengers sink back into their former seats, silent and dumb, strangers as before.

The train is once more moving rapidly away. . . . A group of students, who have been enjoying the summer night, raise a loud cheer after it, and now the merry university town is left behind in the far distance. The two in the carriage are still motionless; their eyes no longer seek one another; on the contrary, they both look fixedly out of their respective windows, as if they were staring at a world of dreams.

Gone by! gone by! has their happiness also whirled by them, and dwindled into nought, as the landscape they are passing, as the smoke which vanishes before their eyes? They are incapable of thought, there is a chaos in their heads, and a beating in their hearts, as if they would turn mad, and their hearts break for this great and immeasurable woe.

The tepid air of night enters and refreshes their burning foreheads. The moon has risen in the heavens, sharply delineating the distant mountains, and causing the broad river to sparkle with a thousand gems.

Is it then so long ago since they stood side by side upon these mountains, or were rocked together upon this river, for ever seeking and meeting each other, these two who now turn away the one from the other so sadly and

so coldly? And was it not here in this lovely land of the vine that they had told each other of their love?

At the remembrance a tear starts to her eyes, and suddenly, as if overpowered by an intense longing, she turns towards him and looks at him imploringly; but he has turned his head away, and is looking out with a fixed gaze and a marble coldness upon his face, as if he completely ignores who that woman is sitting in the same carriage with him.

Then the softer feeling in her breast is also frozen up, she remembers her letter disdainfully returned to her, without even having been opened, and it now rises as a wall between them.

And he, what is he thinking of? He is thinking that once before a rushing and rattling train also led him day and night, every moment seeming too long which kept him from her; he remembers how he had thought nothing of distance, and had laughed at impossibilities in order to look at her, and to hold her rejoicing in his arms—if only for a few minutes.

And that is the woman who now sits there opposite to him. He can hear the soft rustle of her dress at every movement she makes, and the heavy breathing which passes across her lips.

What would he not have given in old times for such hours spent with her? And now that lovely form has lost all charm for him. Almost unwillingly he turns his eyes upon her.

Yes, those are the same admirably chiselled features, the same long black eyelashes shadowing her cheek. Those are the same red and full lips, and on her brow those same locks of dark hair which had been his delight. Beautiful, more beautiful than ever, ... and yet he turns away suddenly and indignantly.

Where did he last see that face pourtrayed? Ah, yes;

he remembers now, he saw it in a newspaper as the likeness of the most admired and sought-after beauty of a circus.

He closes his eyes so that he may see her no longer. Perhaps his heart would have melted had he found her pale and worn; but he finds her fresher and more blooming than ever. The fact is, we can bear any amount of sorrow in the exuberant days of our youth; and it is only later on that it leaves marks on our brow and poisons the blood which flows in our veins.

The train puffs on farther and farther. They are in the plain now, and the romance of that mountainous country is as far away from them as the romance of their own lives. God help them! Will all now be with them as flat, as devoid of charm, as this landscape drawn out in so melancholy a fashion by the grey morning dawn? Farther, farther, hour after hour. The night is over, and the train still moving on, together with their thoughts. In their minds arise endless questions, prayers, and accents of indignation, but none pass their lips. When will he get out? Is she not arrived at the end of her journey? Now, again, a shrill whistle is heard, and the name of a large south German town is called out. She raises herself as if with some great alarm; the journey has lasted so long, and yet it seems so short.

The old abigail now awakes and arranges the parcels in order to get out.

Nora also takes her small bag in a mechanical way. She is obliged to pass in front of Curt, and for one moment her eyes rest upon his face; no longer with a terrified look as before, but full of a silent despair.

Now, indeed, he may be satisfied with the wan and sorrowing expression he had missed; her lovely face is deadly pale and completely upset with grief.

A mist suddenly rises before his eyes at that moment,

and he holds out his hand, but only from pure courtesy.

A gentleman, who has evidently been awaiting her on the platform, is already on the carriage-steps and helps her down. Only a dumb and cold bow, and she is gone. She is met with zealous offers of service, but she refuses them with a haughty gesture; the gentleman, however, takes possession of her things, as if it were his right to do so, and leads her to the carriage waiting for her.

Curt stares at them as if he had seen two ghosts. The guard passes by, and, remembering him as the traveller who had given him so generous a present, feels drawn to a little conversation.

"Handsome lady that, sir, ain't she? She's quite a celebrity, too, at the Karsten Circus. Her father arrived yesterday by an extra train; but perhaps your Excellency would like a cup of coffee, as the morning is uncommon fresh?" he added, looking at Curt's pale face.

The man is right, Curt is shivering from head to foot, but he refuses to take anything, and sinks back in his seat, as if decidedly disinclined to carrying on the conversation. The guard, who feels particularly chatty and amiable this morning, is obliged to look out for some more cheerfully-disposed traveller.

At last Curt is alone. She is gone, after having spent these long hours with him. The moment God had perhaps sent them in which to clear up every doubt is now irretrievably past. One word might have saved them, and neither spoke it.

"Nora! Nora!" he now cries in wild despair, covering his face with his hands. "Oh, why did you not give me that look a second earlier?" and in the agony of his grief, remembering that it is too late, all his buried love lives in him again and tortures him.

The day is advanced when the train stops at the station

Curt is to get out at. Lily's smart footman is already awaiting the traveller on the platform, hat in hand, and leads him at once to the carriage.

The sun is shining on the neatest possible equipage, so bright and clean, that it quite dazzles one, and the little ponies toss about their heads with a coquettish wagging, as much as to say: "If there is taste left in the world, people must think us remarkably pretty!"

But Curt is in no mood for admiring anything, and he throws himself, tired and exhausted, into the vehicle with as little ado as if it were a common fly, and closing his eyes, he does not even bestow a look at the green meadows or upon the fine house which now rises in so stately a manner before him, amidst the luxurious trees of its beautiful park.

Lily has already asked herself ten times the same two questions to-day: "Will he come? Will he not come?" She had often peeped out of the window opening upon the pathway which leads up to the house, like Sister Ann, to see whether any one is coming. Now, at last, the rolling sound of wheels upon the bridge announces that her guest has at last arrived. She hastens to her drawing-room in order to receive him with all the dignity of the mistress of the house.

The mixture of reserve and of intense joy depicted on her face are really very becoming; but, alas, it is only the footman who enters.

"The count's compliments, and he begs to be excused from appearing to-night. He has been obliged to go to his room, feeling too exhausted to present his homage at once, after the fatigue of a long journey. He hopes to be able to come down to-morrow."

Lily's face sinks to zero, for hope deferred maketh the heart sick. But what is to be done?

CHAPTER XVIII.

"THAT was an uncommonly silent companion, upon my word!" muttered old Hannah, rubbing her sleepy eyes, as she sat down in the carriage by the side of her young mistress. Dear old Hannah! she had remained faithful to the director, and accompanied Nora everywhere; taking care of her as devotedly now as she had done in the days of her childhood. "Nora dear! I'm sure you're shivering," she added anxiously, pulling up the carriage-rug in order to cover her completely with it. "That all comes of racing about the world, and travelling day and night as we do. Thank God! we shall stay here some time at least! My old bones can hardly put up with it, and I'm sure your young ones cannot do so either," she went on to herself, as she now with some difficulty got down from the carriage which had stopped at one of the best hotels.

The gentleman who had met Nora at the station was likewise there to receive her.

"The director arrived last night," he reported. "Everything is fixed for the day after to-morrow, unless you are too tired, Miss Nora."

Nora did not seem to hear him, and only nodded silently, without taking any further notice of him.

"*She's* ungracious!" muttered Landolfo. "I suspect you're a little too much spoilt, young lady! You'll have to get out of the way of that, if I am not much mistaken. But, now I think of it, the young gentleman who looked out of the carriage window bore a great resemblance to the count. . . . I hope no *rendez-vous!* However, it doesn't much matter, she may do what she likes, our *belladonna,* but she won't get him back again in a hurry! So that's the reason why our young duchess was so ungracious! Well! Never mind! We can wait, and settle our accounts a little later on," he added, laughing sardonically, and entering the dining-room in order to drown his rage in spirits.

Old Hannah had already arranged Nora's room as comfortably as she used to do her mother's in days gone by; and now, smoothing out the white pillows, she drew the window-curtains, and brought her a comfortable dressing-gown in which to rest after her fatiguing journey. Nora had submitted to everything passively, and lay extended speechless upon the sofa. Old Hannah looked at her, and shook her head deprecatingly.

"This restless life will kill her, just as it did her mother," she muttered as she went out. "Yes, yes, kill her, I say, were she ten times as strong! Poor, handsome missy!"

Nora was alone, and complete rest had followed the well-nigh endless motion. But she hardly realised the difference; everything seemed still to be puffing and blowing, rushing and roaring in her brain, and to be hunting her to death. She saw him still before her, so cold, so mute, so inanimate! It had been a dreadful night, and the storm of those hours appeared to have annihilated her poor, suffering heart. Three years had passed by since that first appearance in the circus, after which she had lain thus broken down, then, as now, by great physical and

moral exertion. Since then her reputation had spread far and wide in all the towns on the Continent, and Landolfo's calculations had so far been crowned by complete success. Her beauty and her talent had worked wonders, and the director might well be pleased.

In her soul, meanwhile, a reaction had gradually taken place, for we poor mortals are alike unable to remain for ever in the depths of woe or on the pinnacle of joy. In the face of an irrevocable fact, we are generally visited by a certain inward tranquillity—all the more so when this fact brings with it an active and busy life which requires continual bodily fatigue. The latter is indeed the best remedy against the mind's sickness. Nora's occupation in itself was one which she liked, and as she did it well she could not help feeling some pleasure in it. She had gradually become used to the public, and its applause did not move her more than the sudden cessation of it would have astonished her. She was accustomed to such homage, and accepted it as an understood thing.

Her father had tried to spare her feelings as much as he possibly could. She was never forced to mix with the rest of the company, and never took part in any combined or theatrical representation. She always appeared at his side, displaying her skill in riding, or showing off the paces of some new horse.

She certainly had thought, when first she appeared in public, that she would never be able to bear it—that she would die from the pain of humiliation and of lost love—but one does not die so easily. There was steel in her blood, steel in her mind, which caused her unwittingly to raise her head once more, feeling how great was the sacrifice she had made, feeling at peace, for she had been unselfish. It had been until now her great object to remain upon this pedestal of self-respect and of conviction that she was worthy of Curt's esteem.

The sight of her unopened letter had indeed smitten her as with a dagger, but at that time she was almost incapable of feeling anything very acutely—her feelings being quite benumbed by all the anguish she had gone through. She did not even recognise his handwriting, so changed was it, and the envelope was so covered by stamps and post-marks that she fancied, perhaps, the letter had never reached him. She put it carefully away just as it was, so that she might one day let him read therein of all the deep sorrow which alone could justify her in his eyes. Her life, too, would be a justification—she lived quietly and gravely, away from the noisy pastimes, even from the innocent ones, of the people who surrounded her. Wherever she went, she was pursued by the obnoxious admiration of young men. She found admirers in every rank, and her step-mother assured her over and over again that she need only raise her little finger in order to have ten counts at her feet, instead of the faithless one she chose to pine for.

But Nora only shook her head silently when such speeches were made to her; she never received any of their tokens of admiration, nor did ever an encouraging look fall upon any aspirant.

The young men asserted that the proud Amazon never touched any of the bouquets or of the wreaths which fell at her feet. The clowns generally picked them up, and, with comical looks and gestures, either bombarded the public with them, or used them as adornments for their own ridiculous selves, to the discomfiture of those who had offered them, and to the rejoicing of the general public. It was dreadful to think of all the mass of flowers and of money which had thus been uselessly thrown away for the prudish beauty. Some of the most daring had at last sent their bouquets directly to her house, and it had required all her step-mother's eloquence to prevent Nora returning them. It was only the thought that to make

herself enemies might injure her father's career, which induced her to keep the flowery messages; but they bloomed away and at last withered without her casting one look upon them, or without her deigning to read one of the declarations which lay concealed amongst the blossoms. She never assisted at any of the suppers arranged by gentlemen, under the pretext of amusing her father, but in reality with a faint hope of enticing his daughter out of her retirement.

Her warmest admirers had only been able to steal a few short moments at the *manége*, or, when she was out walking; but always at her father's side.

It soon went from mouth to mouth that the beautiful Amazon could be seen, early in the morning, attired in the darkest and most simple of garments, on her way to church, at an hour when all the *beau monde* was still lying in profound sleep.

Her charms had induced some particularly energetic young men to try and effect a meeting there; but, as soon as she noticed this, she no longer went to the same church. Moreover, the fresh morning air had somewhat cooled down the warmth of their feelings, and made them lose their taste for the object of these expeditions.

Such had been Nora's life until now, but last night had cruelly torn away the veil from her eyes, had extinguished the last ray of hope in her breast.

Despised! despised! expulsed from the heart which had been all in all to her! So, he had found no extenuating circumstances; not a ray of sympathy or compassion had he bestowed upon her in the hours of her dark despair! For despair it was. She clutched her head convulsively and pressed her hands passionately upon her black hair, hiding her face amidst the cushions, as if she could not support even the faintest ray of light—so fathomless was her shame, so deep her sorrow.

This pain was too much. She felt she had not deserved it, and the heart, thus trampled upon, rose against the injustice she had suffered. What was *he* that he should not have vouchsafed her one word, or granted her one look? Had he not broken the vow he had made to watch over her, to protect, and to save her from her cruel position?

And at the very first wave of misfortune he had left her to herself! Yes, thought she, in the bitterness of her heart, she had made it easy for him to break from her; she had instantly returned him his word, and freed him from every engagement. As for him, he had at once accepted the proffered liberty, and had not even held out his little finger to save her from her depth of misery. Why was she mourning? Why had she been mourning for him all this time? He had certainly greeted his liberty as a welcome event, whilst she had been offering up everything to the very shadow of his love. And now, forgotten, despised, why should she lay such severe restrictions upon herself? Why should she refuse entrance to every joy life still had in store for her?

Her blood rushed tumultuously and rebelliously through her veins, and the forsaken heart cried aloud for distraction, for something to forget, for something, whatever it might be, to fill the void.

She had often come across those light and butterfly natures, who flutter joyously through the world so careless and so free. Yes, she had met them, and after all, those were the natures best fitted to her position. 'Tis true that they often sank into the dust, but still they had been cradled amongst flowers, had feasted unconcernedly upon the sweets of life, had been happy, so long as it lasted. But she, she was also trodden in the dust, and had enjoyed nothing of the brilliancy of life.

What right had she to think herself better than those with whom destiny had placed her? Why should she wear herself to death, in order to attain that height she could, perhaps, never reach, and upon which, anyhow, the world would never suffer her to remain? Whatever might happen now, she was lost to every real happiness, and, yet, live she must, without this burning thirst after it.

They are wicked hours those in which our excited feelings gain the upper hand; but the purest of souls goes through such hours, when it is tossed too wildly about by despair, and thus comes in contact with the pitch which lies at the bottom of every earthly nature.

Long did Nora remain thus, until her excitement died a natural death. But it is only after an inundation, after the high waters have retired, that one sees how changed is the whole aspect of the earth.

When Nora arose, her face bore another expression than it had borne the night before. It was no holy light which shone in her eyes, and the lips had a contemptuous turn which no longer spoke of calm and of retiring modesty. There was a new life, but what the Scotch would call an *uncanny* life, which seemed to animate her whole person. She was still arranging her hair, when a knock was heard at the door, and a beautiful bouquet was brought in to her. She was on the point of refusing it, according to her old habit, but immediately afterwards she accepted it. It was a beautiful assemblage of rare and costly flowers, perfuming the whole room with their narcotic scent. She seized hold of it, and pressed her face into it, inhaling its perfume, as if she hoped therein to find intoxication. She knew very well the offering came from a princely admirer who had pursued her for months with such-like gifts. She had disdained them until now, but to-day it pleased her, nay, it filled her with a wild joy, to think how many were sighing for a look of her.

"I can bring them all to my feet, when I choose," she said, and she tossed her head proudly back. "I can lead them all where I like by a look from these eyes, by a gesture of this hand. I can make these proud men as miserable as I have been made myself. And I will show him that I need only hold up my little finger in order to gain that which he refuses me."

A few hours later when Nora went to her father to discuss the arrangements for that evening, she struck him as being much more accommodating than usual.

It soon became the talk of the whole town that Nora Karsten had gone through some mysterious transformation. She had never been so beautiful or so enchanting as this season. She had almost completely lost that calm and even stiff reserve of manner, for which one had found fault with her. This change was mostly attributed to a journey she had made in England and in France.

Nora no longer refused to appear in combined scenes, and a particularly romantic one soon became famous by the part she played in it. The subject treated of was Libussa, the famous man-hater, Bohemia's beautiful queen. The scene represented a combat between the army of Amazons and their antagonists of the stronger sex, and gave a full display of good acting, as well as of good riding. It was, moreover, remarkable by the brilliancy of the costumes displayed. The victory of the Amazons, their wild chase after the flying, and, at last, Libussa left alone face to face with the brave Scharka, and fighting with her pride and her love; then the triumphal march and the sorrow of the Amazons, when Libussa, having pierced Scharka with her arrow, herself falls and dies. This was of itself an animated and attractive scene, such as had rarely been witnessed at the circus; but every one rushed to see, above all, the incomparable Nora Karsten in the character of Libussa.

A few weeks later, and the circus had moved on as usual to the Austrian capital. There, also, the representations were expected with great interest, considerably augmented by the report that some of Libussa's more fanatic admirers had followed the troop to Vienna. It was, however, maintained, that now as ever, and notwithstanding her change of manner, Nora had not changed her coldness to, and hatred of, men.

It was a fashionable and motley assemblage to be seen at the Karsten Circus on the evening of the first representation, and the director had been careful that none of the accessories of the scene should be neglected.

Beautiful, distractingly beautiful, was Libussa as she now rode in, surrounded by the light legion of her Amazons. She rode a black steed of the purest race, which seemed longing to be in the thick of the affray. A gilt coat of mail imprisoned her elegant and powerfully built form, and a skirt of heavy silver stuff flowed in rich folds from her lovely waist. On her head was a silver helmet, which left her features perfectly free, and from which her long, black locks fell beneath her waist. She sat there, so lightly on her fiery horse, that one might have taken her for some vision breathed there by poetry; and yet, firm and strong as iron, she was the very embodiment of that proud heroine.

The whole scene was magnificent, showing off in this cavalry skirmish the most artistic and most varied positions the noble animals could take; but all eyes rested alone upon Libussa, who, as if conducted by some charm, was always to be seen rising high above the others, ever conspicuous by her beauty, as well as by the masterly management of her horse.

One thundering applause followed upon another. Then came the still more dramatic representation of the chase after the flying, in which the Amazons seemed to be dash-

ing forth wildly, headed by Libussa, with her lance held high above her helmet, her hair flowing, and her eyes flashing fire. The words: "*Wallkyre Schild-Jungfrau,*" passed whisperingly round the ranks.

Now the moment was come in which the last remaining warrior places himself courageously before Libussa, surrounded by her triumphant Amazons. Libussa, on the point of shooting her arrow, suddenly stops; and her horse raising itself almost straight up into the air adds as much excitement to the scene, as the flashing look of triumph which its mistress bestows on the public. Her look now falls upon a group of men assembled in one part of the large circus. The audience breaks out into loud applause, but Libussa's eyes remain riveted to that spot as if she could never turn them away again. The unfortunate Scharka places himself in vain in the most daring attitudes before her, awaiting the death-blow; but she seems completely to overlook him.

A ghastly pallor suddenly overspreads her face, and she is seized with so convulsive a trembling, that her stepmother, who is one of the Amazons, notices it, and hastening forward to her side, whispers a few words which bring her back to consciousness.

Nora then seems to awake as out of a dream, and with great self-control brings the scene to a close. The public has taken the little *intermezzo* for a masterly representation of Libussa's inward struggle, and her complete annihilation, as she glides from her horse into the arms of her weeping Amazons, lighted up by mystical and blood-red flames, crowns the whole.

But it is well for Nora that it enters into her part to be carried out as if senseless. It would have been impossible for her to remain standing. She does not see the wreaths which are showered down upon her, nor hear the thundering applause which accompanies her exit—for as soon as

she has left the arena she falls into a violent and hysterical fit of sobbing. There, however, where she had evidently seen something like a ghost of happy times, there stood a man, clad in a long priestly coat, and who, surrounded by a number of brilliant uniforms, had followed the representation with a breathless attention and a meditative, almost a stern, look. He now seemed unconscious of the tumultuous rejoicings around him. "That's right, sir, I'm glad to see you don't quite despise our worldly pleasures," said a tall, thin officer, stroking his moustache. "Have you been brought to town by this eighth wonder of the world? Or have you any other reason for visiting us again? The countess has deserted us completely during the last years."

"The illness and absence of her son have been good reasons for keeping her away from society," answered the priest. "I am on my way to Count Curt, who has, unfortunately, fallen ill again at Göhlitz—Countess Lily's place."

"What! has Curt returned at last from his travels? and is he at Göhlitz, too? Well, I suppose his mother won't complain at his being kept a prisoner *there*. But what on earth is the matter with him?"

"His health seems to have been destroyed by that brain-fever in Pera; he has never been quite himself since then," explained the chaplain. "And I suppose that the fatigue of the journey has caused this relapse."

"That's too sad!" said the officer sympathisingly. "I always thought it an unlucky idea of his mother to send him away; she gave herself a deal of trouble about it too. Heaven knows why! Is he better now?"

"Yes, he is getting better, I am happy to say, and has expressed a great wish to see me. I am on my way there, and shall start to-morrow. Countess Degenthal has been staying there for a few weeks."

"Then I shall go also one of these days to see my old friend, and to pay my respects to the young lady. Where is the younger son, Count Nicholas?"

"With his regiment. He has grown very strong, and has really turned out very well during the last few years."

"Really!" But he will never be able to hold a candle to Curt; a capital fellow that was! There are few like him, and it would really be dreadful if he did not get well again! But come now, sir, the crowd has diminished, and I think we can get out."

They made a few steps forward, and a group of young officers joined the "Rittmeister."

"What an uncommonly beautiful girl that is!" cried out one of the youngest enthusiasts. "Upon my word, I have never seen any one like that girl—any one to be named in the same breath. And such riding, too! I've seen her over and over again, but I've never admired her so much as to-day; she has really made enormous progress."

"I don't know about that," said the Rittmeister drily. "I liked her better as she used to be. There was something which struck one as out of the ordinary line seeing her ride, as it were, for riding's sake, and leaving herself completely out of the question. Now, she's just like any one else, and shows herself off as well as her horse. But just look, baron; there's Prince B., who, they say, has come over from the North only on her account."

"Ah! the tall gentleman with the bald head?"

"Yes, I've heard fabulous stories about all the trouble he gives himself in order to please her, but it's quite useless. She has a long-standing engagement with her father's agent, who watches over her with the jealous eye of a lynx."

The chaplain heaved a sigh as he heard this last re-

mark, and the Rittmeister, turning to him, said: "But, surely, you will come with us a little way in order to refresh yourself after this suffocating air."

"Thank you," said the chaplain, "I have had enough worldliness for one evening. Moreover, I start somewhat early to-morrow, and shall, therefore, look forward to seeing you at Göhlitz." And with these words the two men shook hands heartily and parted.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE next morning, at an early hour, a note was brought in to Nora. The gentleman who had brought it, her maid told her, was waiting for an answer. She had spent the night in feverish restlessness, and was now sitting at her writing-desk, trying in vain to word a letter, and tearing up one failure after another. She now tore the envelope open and found a card, on which was written: "Will you allow me to call upon you?" Nora hesitated a few seconds, and then, as if she could not help herself, she wrote on the same card a few words of consent. The servant had already taken the card, or else she would have recalled her consent almost as soon as it was written.

In a few minutes, the chaplain appeared. He extended his hand to Nora, who rose in an agitated manner to meet him. For a moment he held her hand in his, and looked gravely, gently, and sympathetically in her eyes.

This look brought all the remembrances of her childhood before her with an overpowering gush of feeling.

"And so, after all, you find me thus!" she cried in anguish. "A circus-rider! a horse-breaker!" and throwing herself upon a sofa, she covered her face and sobbed aloud.

"God be praised for those tears," said the priest, laying

his hand upon her head. "My poor child, I thank heaven that it should be such a sacrifice to you. Yesterday I feared that you had grown accustomed to it."

"Oh, would that I had!" cried Nora bitterly. "Would that it were no longer a sacrifice, and that I could forget everything—from the first to the last. . . . After all, I've a deal to make me happy: riches, admiration, and, as people say, beauty, all that which, in short, makes life pleasant. Why do I go on clinging to the old thought I should like to forget? And now, you have come too, to renew the combat! I wanted to ask you not to come, and to leave me to my fate. Oh, why did I not follow my first inspiration? Let me go my own way. As it is, nothing can be done, and I shall be perhaps less unhappy if left alone. Why, oh why did you come?"

She spoke with dreadful agitation—this poor, unhappy girl—rapidly, harshly, almost repellingly.

"Why did I come?" said the chaplain. "Simply in order to keep the promise I once gave your dying mother—that I would stand by her child so long as it lay in my power. Would to God I had been with you, and could have advised you at that moment in which you took a step which has brought so much misery upon you and upon others."

"Others! Who has been made miserable by any step of mine, I should like to know?" Nora interrupted him in a querulous tone. "Others have given up, without a pang, that which they had loved; have forgotten, and they now despise, her who evidently does not seem worthy of pity in their sight."

"We have never the right to judge others as to the amount of their sufferings," said the chaplain quietly, "for no one can tell the bitterness which may fill another's heart. Perhaps he was mistaken in you, as you are mistaken in him. Perhaps all this has taken place in order

to lead you more surely—although differently than you had hoped—to the same great end."

"Oh no; I shall never reach that end now!" she cried bitterly.

"Not, perhaps, to the earthly one we had hoped for, but to the one to which all roads may lead; and, indeed, child, I think that God Himself is leading you by the hand; for His ways are always inaugurated by some great sacrifice, such as you seem to have made."

"Do you really think," she asked with a touch of satire, "that the road I have now chosen brings me so *much* nearer to the goal?"

"There exists no position we cannot sanctify," said the chaplain, always in the same quiet manner. "The greater the temptation the greater the glory of not succumbing."

"And do you imagine it so easy to conquer a great temptation?" she answered passionately. "Look there!" and she scattered about the tiny *billets-doux* which lay on the table, the very appearance of which was suspicious. "Look there!" and she petulantly crushed the wreaths and the bouquets which embalmed the room. "Do you think all that makes no impression in the long run? That it does not steal into one's mind, coax itself into one's heart, and bewitch one by degrees? Do you believe that we can hear for ever the loud and enthusiastic applause resounding in our ears, and remain for ever passive and indifferent to it? Particularly when one knows that there is no other happiness in store for one. . . . . Since the last anchor is broken, since I know that he despises me, my heart yearns after compensation, and wants to taste at least of those joys the world can offer. Oh, I feel it! I feel that I shall succumb. After all, I am not different from others. I shall learn to love

and enjoy life as thousands better than I have done before me, as thousands will do after me."

With a thorough knowledge of the human heart, the chaplain did not discuss the details of this passionate speech; he only selected one part of it in order not to frighten away the wounded and suffering soul.

"Man's love is at best but a poor anchor," he said. "But how do you know that he despises you?"

At this question the blush became deeper on Nora's cheeks, and, unable to answer him at once, she arose, and, going to the window, laid her burning forehead against the fresh pane of glass.

"Have you heard from him?" asked the chaplain.

"I came a few weeks ago in the express train from Paris. A gentleman sat in the carriage with me . . . . a gentleman who no longer knew me," she added hoarsely.

The chaplain started. "You travelled with him?"

Nora nodded silently, and her whole body was convulsed with a nervous trembling at the very remembrance.

The chaplain now understood what had caused Curt's relapse, but was it prudent to tell her what an impression the meeting had made upon him? Was it wise to revive the spark of hope now extinguished in her heart? But, after all, kindness and truth go before wisdom, and the priest, simple and straightforward as he was, felt that he could not withhold a balsam from one so deeply injured, or conceal a fact which might do her good.

"Count Degenthal fell seriously ill after that journey," he said. "I am on my way to see him at Göhlitz, which place he has not yet been able to leave."

Nora suddenly raised her head. "Seriously ill?" she asked breathlessly.

"It is a relapse of his former illness. The doctor attributes it to a complete shattering of the nervous system, the cause of which no one can explain."

"Relapse!" repeated Nora. "What do you mean? What illness are you talking about?"

"Did you know nothing about it?"

Nora shook her head.

"I knew nothing but that he was abroad at the Embassy," she said in a stifled voice.

"Then listen, and see whether he loved you faintly. Three years ago, that news reaching him unprepared, felled him to the ground, and kept him during long months on a sick bed." And then the chaplain, in his clear and quiet way, recounted all he knew about Curt.

Deadly pale and awfully still, Nora listened. "O my God!" she said slowly; "ill and suffering all these years!"

Ill and suffering for her sake. In her immense sorrow she had only thought of herself, and had never represented to herself what he might have suffered. And now she saw that his delicate nature had not even supported the blow as well as she had done, and this was the man whom she had almost hated in her heart on account of his cold indifference! She felt herself a culprit standing there in all the strength of her youth and health.

"O my God!" she began once more. "This is dreadful; I never supposed it for a moment!"

"We are generally so much taken up by our own sorrows that we cannot easily represent to ourselves the sufferings of others, especially, as in this case, when we feel aggrieved."

"Oh, sir, hear me! Indeed it was not my fault," she cried; "you don't know what brought it about. . . . I can hardly speak about it. I wrote it all to Curt, explained the whole to him, and he condemned me without hearing me; he returned the letter without even having read it, or without sending me a word of comfort."

"In that case he did not read the letter, and he probably heard through some indirect way of your appear-

ance in public, and felt deeply hurt, as he had placed all his confidence in you. His long illness followed immediately upon this news. And now will you tell me, Nora, how all this took place?" asked the priest earnestly.

"Yes, I will tell it you; but under the seal of confession, for others are implicated in it." She fell on her knees, as if she were really going to confess a fault, and then she poured out the complete recital of those dreadful days during which her father's life—nay, more than that, his very soul—had been at stake. She described the fearful terror which had forced the vow from her.

The chaplain listened in silence. Even in thought he had never accused her of lightness or of caprice, but he had been unable to explain to himself the course she had taken. The greatness of her struggle and the magnitude of her sacrifice surpassed all his expectations. He was filled with a deep compassion for the poor girl who had acted so heroically, and had gained nothing but contempt in return.

"Was I wrong? Oh, do not condemn me!" she said in conclusion. "I have suffered so much. . . . I destroyed my happiness with my own hands."

"God forbid that I should condemn you!" said the chaplain deeply moved. "I don't know myself what I might have advised at that moment! Your decision was made out of pure filial love and devotion. God will bless you for it! Yes, your life has been even a more difficult and hard one than your poor mother ever supposed—you've had to give up everything in order to save your father."

"But have I saved him?" she whispered hesitatingly. "Have I saved him?—that is the terrible query which has of late arisen in my heart. Oh! I can hardly tell you all the dreadful doubts which have assailed me of late, and against which I have vainly tried to shut my eyes. . .

. . . And so I wanted to take life in a superficial sort of way, because every kind of serious thought was martyrdom. That Landolfo is our evil genius, and my father is completely in his hands. Oh, my poor dear father! He is no longer what he used to be," she added, with a deep shame burning on her cheeks. "This life draws every one down. Who knows? Perhaps, if I had not made this sacrifice, necessity would have compelled him to give the whole thing up."

"You have done what you considered right, and that is sufficient before God and your own conscience. Do not torment yourself about it. One cannot foresee everything; and when one has done one's duty, one must leave the rest to God. But could you not retire now, that your father's affairs are once more flourishing?"

"No, no; my father says that it is I alone who keep matters going, and that the loss is not yet filled up; and I am sure that Landolfo takes good care that it should not be filled up so soon. He moves heaven and earth against me."

"Against you? Your father's darling? . . . Do you mean to say that you are not well treated?" cried the chaplain in surprise.

"Oh! I did not mean it in that sense," she said with a sad smile. "I am but too well treated, flattered, and adored by all, because I am necessary to all. But he—the man I have just named—he has his own wicked plans, he wishes to bring my father down lower and lower, and to make him completely his slave by flattering him. . . . But they shall not conquer me," she added with a flashing eye. "I see one plan following another, one low intrigue taking the place of another. No, no; I must not desert my father now."

"Cannot you explain yourself more clearly?" asked the chaplain.

No, no ;" whispered Nora. "It is only like a ghost still which I see slowly rising before me." . . .

"Nora," said the chaplain gravely, after having sat for some moments lost in reflection ; "accomplish your task, hard and difficult as it is ; it forced you to trample over your happiness, it leads you across great dangers ; but keep your heart pure and strong, and then outward attacks will be powerless against it. Perhaps you are meant to be your father's guardian angel. . . . Grace will not fail you. See, is it not Providence which sent me now, at a moment when you had lost courage, and were on the brink of losing your good resolutions ? Is it not a comfort that everything should now be made clear to you, and that you should no longer feel the bitterness which threatened to poison the pure and noble sacrifice you had made ? Go on now, firmly and gravely, upon the road of sacrifice, and do not give up your eternal birthright for paltry vanity and petty bitterness."

"But how long, how long will it last ?" she whispered to herself.

"So long as the Almighty chooses. In one moment He can solve all the difficulties which now seem insurmountable."

The chaplain rose, and Nora also. Laying her burning hand in his, she said—

"Yes, it was indeed providential that you should have come. I was standing on the brink of a fearful precipice. Help me, help me, that I may not give way !"

At the same moment a knock was heard at the door, and as Nora called out, "Come in !" the director entered.

"Ah, ah ; you have a visitor ?" he said with feigned surprise. "What ! you, sir ? What brings you so suddenly here again ? It's a great pleasure, I'm sure—a great pleasure to see you." He offered the chaplain his hand, but there was something measured in his tone, something

forced in his attitude which showed how unwelcome the visit was.

The chaplain found him changed since the last time he had seen him. His figure had become more corpulent, and his features seemed swollen, his eye, too, was lifeless and uncertain, even his walk was different, and he had completely lost the attitude of former years. On noticing all this, the chaplain was deeply pained, and as he looked at the daughter standing beside her father, her sweet face, still bearing the impression of the grave conversation she had just had, the contrast between those two was something glaring and intensely painful. At any rate, she could no longer lean upon her father, and feel supported by him.

Meanwhile, Nora explained to the director how it was that the chaplain, going through town, had called upon her, and the latter said that the hour of his departure was approaching.

"I'm afraid that this meeting has agitated you, my child," said the director, looking suspiciously at her grave expression. "Everything has happened as our older and wiser heads had prophesied," he added, turning to the chaplain. "However, young people must learn through their own experience, you see—but my daughter is very happy all the same. She will have told you that her life is not so bad as it appears; and wasn't I right in saying that she would do great things some day? Was it possible to see anything better than last night? The public were completely carried away!"

"The Emperor of Russia was right," said the chaplain, smiling to Nora.

"Yes, yes; she has quite put her father into the shade!" answered the director with a loud laugh. "Nora, when you come downstairs, you will see what a number of nosegays are awaiting you, I could scarcely count them.

Yes! she is my support, my pride, this daughter of mine, but rather a spoilt princess!" and laying his arm about her waist, he drew her towards him. The director spoke hesitatingly, and he was strangely flushed, so that a doubt came over the chaplain's mind—a doubt which would have been confirmed had he known that Karsten had just been breakfasting with Landolfo. After making him drink a great deal of sherry, Landolfo had told him of the chaplain's visit, and advised him to interrupt it, saying that the "*Pfaff*" would certainly fill his daughter's head with a precious deal of nonsense. Landolfo and the director always breakfasted together now, of course at the director's expense, and generally with the same result. It was but too true, and Nora was right when she said that Landolfo's influence was growing daily greater, and had a most pernicious effect upon him. He not only had the complete direction of affairs in his hands, but he also endeavoured to amuse the director and encourage in him a lurking taste for spirits which had developed itself since his last illness. Those are dangerous years for a man when bodily strength is giving way, and great exertions make him long for tonics and excitement, the years, in short, when, being on the frontier of old age, life's pleasures seem to concentrate themselves in a cup of merriness.

"The prince also called in order to ask after you," continued the director in the same tone; "and begged to have the honour of arranging a little *partie champêtre* for you."

"Thank you, father; you know that I never accept such invitations," said Nora coldly. "I hope you told him so at once."

"Well, well it wouldn't be such a fearful thing for you to go out a little with your mother and me. You were just beginning to be a little reasonable. I hope,

sir, you have not made my little daughter into a nun again. The same fashion doesn't suit every one. It's part of our business not to frighten people away."

"I cannot help thinking that Miss Nora is right in this case; a young lady in her position cannot be too prudent."

"Pooh, pooh! don't turn her head, my reverend friend," said the director with a slight stutter. "She is proud enough as it is, and if she don't take care, she'll be making a mess of the whole thing for me."

"Father dear, if you really think so," said Nora quietly, "I am ready to retire at any moment. As it is, you know that I am not fond of the business, and shall be very glad to look out for some other situation."

"'Pon my honour! just see how high and mighty our spoilt young lady is!" laughed her father, stroking her face. "She knows we can't do without her, that's what it is! But my daughter will not leave her old father in the lurch," he added maudlingly.

Nora, hoping to put an end to so indescribably painful a scene, held out her hand to the chaplain. "I'm afraid we are keeping you, sir," she said sadly; "and at Göhlitz you are expected with anxiety. But I thank you for your visit which has done me all the good in the world. Do not be afraid of me, I shall now be able to fight the battle, and, with God's help, to win it too."

"God bless you, my poor child! and rest assured that He will not forsake you. I have perhaps inflicted greater pain upon you by all I've told you, but, on the other hand, I firmly hope that it has saved you from something worse than sorrow."

"Yes, indeed," said Nora, standing erect and proudly before him. "You have furnished me with new weapons to-day, and, believe me, you have not done so in vain."

The chaplain turned away deeply moved; she seemed

to him still more lonely and forsaken than she had been on that night when he had seen her mother die.

The director also endeavoured to take a becoming farewell of the visitor.

"Don't make a nun of her! don't make a nun of her!" he repeated stupidly. But suddenly he could no longer keep upon his feet, and threw himself upon the first chair he could catch hold of.

The chaplain was hardly out of the room, when Nora followed him rapidly.

"One word more," she said retaining him, and as she did so her lips trembled and her cheeks burned. "Let me have only one piece of news—let me know how he's getting on. Don't tell him anything about me, it would only make him more unhappy; and, as it is, nothing can be changed!"

The chaplain pressed her hand and nodded silently; after which he was gone, thinking, as he went along, of the devoted heroism which lies at the bottom of a woman's heart, who, loving with all her might, prefers to be ill-judged, than to pain the loved one.

As for Nora, she felt it easy to be heroic once more, now that she knew how he had mourned for her.

CHAPTER XX.

LILY'S joy at again meeting her cousin had been singularly damped. He fell so ill after his arrival at Göhlitz, that a doctor had to be sent for, and Lily had thought it necessary to telegraph for his mother to come. The countess arrived the next morning; and oh! what a painful meeting this was to her after so long a separation! The pale face, the emaciated figure, the lifeless expression of his eye, told her that the blow he had received was one of those which change a man outwardly and inwardly for life.

Perhaps she felt something like contrition during the hours she now spent at his bedside, when she found him too tired to support even the sound of his own voice, too indifferent to inquire after his home, too cold and reserved to return her caresses, or to speak one word of confidence in her ear. It seemed as if some cold air had blown upon this young man's heart and had turned it to ice.

But the countess was not fond of searching or discussing the past; she was convinced she had fulfilled her duty, and she did not reflect that we generally accomplish, the most punctually, those duties we have imposed upon ourselves.

His illness? Why, that was *brought on* by "those

people," the climate, and his own weakness. It satisfied her to think how very necessary it always was, and had been, to guide him entirely—how mistaken the chaplain was when he advised his being left to himself, and how careful she must be in the future to keep him away from anything which might remind him of the past.

No one was aware of the cause of this relapse except the chaplain, who kept silence. He believed that there were matters—and this was one—which had better be left to time, and which it was better not to hurry on. Not so the countess.

It was September before Curt was declared to be convalescent. The autumn sun, which retained the brilliancy but had no longer the warmth of summer, shone upon the soft, green turf, and the bright flower-beds beneath the terrace at Göhlitz Castle; and from the drawing-room Lily inhabited in summer one could step out upon this terrace. It was a delicious spot, quite invented for a convalescent: the large, flat stones, the protecting walls of the Castle, and the exotic plants which transformed it into one huge nosegay; in the foreground, the large lawn, with its dainty beds, rich in flowers and varied in colours, and on the horizon, mountains and woods as a background. This was all very enjoyable, and when the sun was too hot or the wind too cold, one could take refuge in the snug and cosy room. Since Curt had risen from his bed he spent many an hour there, in an apparently dreamy rest. This outward rest, however, only served to conceal the inward struggle which he was carrying on with himself ever since he had met Nora. The love, which had once more awakened in him, and the strength of will which sought to hurry it away for ever, went on gnawing at his heart. He felt qualms of conscience, too, and asked himself twenty times in one day whether he had been right to condemn her unheard. And yet he was so exhausted that

he hardly could think. Rest! Rest! That was what he thirsted after. He would have liked to spin a web around him, and to live therein, forgetting all and everything. But we cannot forget at will; and often the more we wish to throw a veil over the past, the more obstacles we encounter in doing so. Those who surrounded him, too, increased the difficulty of the attempt, as they had, more or less, played a part in his life. Lily was the only one who was associated with none of that past, and with whom, therefore, he felt the most at his ease.

And, as for Lily, she only saw in him the missing one she had so often longed for, the sufferer for whose very life she had trembled, and now the convalescent for whose recovery she blessed the Almighty with her whole heart. She was so happy at seeing him up again that her eyes danced for joy. She was so proud, too, of having him quite under her control, of being able to take care of him, that she seemed a transformed being, loving, as she did, with the tenacity of her character.

Curt did not think his corner on the terrace the less pleasant because Lily was so frequently there. Her fresh complexion, her fair hair, and her good-natured eyes, showed off to better advantage in the daytime than in the evening, when she often looked tired and insignificant. The simple morning dress suited her better than the display of an evening one, and it certainly occurred to Curt that his little cousin had improved considerably during the last years. She had grown taller, and her figure more graceful; her formerly chubby round face had thinned down into a pretty oval, though her two little dimples were still distinctly visible when she laughed. And Lily laughed often, in her quiet way, since Curt had become her guest.

His eye rested with pleasure and kindness upon the pretty girl, whose tranquil expression was rather soothing

than not, and it amused him to watch her busily directing her household. She was always occupied, this little woman; with her housekeeping, or her flower-beds which were her great pride, or else giving audience with quite a matronly dignity to her agents and to her poor. These obligations she observed very faithfully, and of late she had found it necessary to fulfil them in the vicinity of the terrace; perhaps, because the young hostess thought it her bounden duty to be as much as possible with her sick guest. Curt often called her away to him, and when she sat by him radiant with joy, it somehow did not put him out in the least that they were only commonplace remarks which fell from her rosy lips. He rather preferred it even, over-tired and over-excited as he was, having done as he thought completely with life. Hundreds of young people have thought it before him, hundreds of young people will think it after him, and it is an idea they are sensitive about so long as it lasts. All the same, however, he found it pleasant to be made so comfortable and to be thought so much of, and now and then the idea vaguely crossed his mind that it must on the whole be agreeable to have a companion so quiet beside one—a companion upon whose shoulders one might place all the petty cares and tiresome small duties of life.

As Curt gradually recovered, Göhlitz became more sociable and more animated.

Countess Degenthal acted as chaperone to the young hostess, and a great many of Curt's friends rushed to Göhlitz to welcome him home. It was thus that one afternoon a small and agreeable circle composed of some country neighbours and a few of Curt's old friends had assembled on the terrace. The Rittmeister whom the chaplain had met at the circus was also of the party.

There is no doubt that there are days, one hardly knows the reason why, when everything seems more beautiful

and every one more charming than usual. Such a day seemed to be shining upon the little society at Göhlitz. It was probably not the bright sun which made Lily so particularly gay, and so different from her usual demure self, but she was gay and different, and her heart alone could have whispered the cause of her transformation. She looked just like a cornflower in her blue gauze dress with blue ribbons flowing about her fair hair. Happiness and love, those two magicians, had given her an expression of life and of animation she had never shown before. As mistress of Göhlitz it would not have been difficult for her anyhow to gain admirers; to-day, however, it was not the hostess but the bright and charming girl who attracted every one to her side. The gentlemen present all hovered about the place where she sat, looking like a little May-queen crowned by the blooming oliander, whose rosy tints did not succeed in putting her freshness into the shade. She accepted every homage with quiet self-possession, and seemed only to have eyes for one person. It was but natural that Curt should not turn away from those friendly eyes which were always seeking his. In whatever mood a man may find himself it would be an extraordinary occurrence that he should feel so dead to all vanity as not to be flattered and pleased at being the chosen favourite amongst so many. Curt reclined beside Lily's chair, his arm on the back of it lazily playing with the ribbons which the soft wind was blowing about, as if he had more than a cousinly right to do so. By degrees his conversation became increased in animation, and the pretty speeches made by the others seemed to spur him on, for he felt that he was the only one who could bring a becoming blush upon Lily's cheek.

"Dare I also approach the queen of the day?" asked the chaplain jokingly, as he now appeared on the balcony.

Lily looked up at him with a proud and happy glance.

"Ah, good day," said the Rittmeister loudly; "yes, here we are all of us at the feet of this young lady, but I can't allow you to be severe upon us, since I saw you hastening to burn incense before the shrine of beauty."

"How so?" asked the chaplain somewhat surprised.

"Well, well," laughed the Rittmeister, "I'm afraid you have a short memory, my dear sir! You'd no time left for us, you were in a great hurry to start upon your journey, and then, after all, you sent up a card to the most renowned beauty of the day! Ah ha! you had no idea that I was at your elbow on the morning you went to make inquiries at the hotel. I trust, however, that you did not push your holy zeal too far, and that you were not too severe upon the young lady. Where would the Circus Karsten be without the lovely Nora?"

"Ah!" said the chaplain, anything but pleased with the good Rittmeister's somewhat coarse joke, "you are alluding to my visit to Miss Nora Karsten; well, yes, I did call upon her. I have known her from her childhood upwards," he added quietly.

Curt suddenly started, and Lily's blue ribbon was once more allowed to flutter about at liberty. Curt gave no other sign of emotion, remaining apparently indifferent in his recumbent position.

Not so the countess, who was seated near the group, and who now looked up horror-struck, as if she could hardly believe her own ears.

"Yes," continued the unconscious Rittmeister, rushing headlong into destruction, "there's no denying that that girl on horseback is one of the most lovely sights a fellow can see for his money. Really, Degenthal, you ought to see her, if, indeed, you've not come across her in your journey, the Circus Karsten has been almost everywhere."

"No," said Degenthal slowly and coldly.

"Then go to Vienna and have a look at her, she's really

worth the while, particularly in her present character of Libussa, she is creating a great furore. Even the reverend gentleman here seemed to be quite delighted with her."

"I don't know about my having been delighted," answered the chaplain; "but I know that I was filled with a deep compassion for the poor girl who was forced, much against her will, to appear in the Circus. She was educated for better things."

"Curt," interrupted the countess crossly, "the air is becoming very fresh, and you should certainly not remain out any longer; do pray go in."

The young man gave her no answer, nor yet did he follow her advice, unless the fact that he put his hat on and drew it right over his face, was a proof that *he* also was careful of his health.

The dauntless Rittmeister did not allow his train of thought to be disturbed.

"Forced!" he said, "why forced? It seems quite natural that Karsten's daughter should have taken up that line. But I've also heard that she's very respectable —no little weakness, you know," and the Rittmeister winked in a sapient manner.

"People say that she's betrothed to her father's agent, that handsome, flashy-looking man, called Landolfo," said another gentleman.

"I've heard that also," put in some one else. "She refused to appear during a long time, and then gave in to please him."

"You will excuse me," observed the chaplain, "if I assert that all this was gossip."

"But I know I heard something about a love story," reiterated the Rittmeister. "I'm rather in a muddle about it now, but I'm sure there *was* something."

"Those things are so often talked about without there being any truth in them. In this case, I can positively

assert that Miss Nora was forced, by completely different circumstances, to take a step so intensely antipathetic to her nature, and I can only say that I entertain a deep respect and esteem for her."

"Now, really, my dear Curt," said the countess in a still more sharp and impatient tone, "it is really too foolish of you to remain out. Just look what a mist is falling; how can you expect to get well if you commit such follies?"

"*Je n'en vois peut être pas la necessité,*" answered the young man, rising and going as far as the drawing-room door, against which he remained leaning, as if he could not tear himself away from the conversation.

Lily now spoke: "Nora Karsten used to be a great friend of mine, and I was very, very fond of her. She and I were at the same school, and I refused to believe it when I heard that she was going to appear at the Circus. But I'm sure it is as the chaplain says, and that some very urgent reason must have moved her to it. Perhaps her father suddenly lost his fortune?"

"It doesn't look like it anyhow, Countess Lily. The Circus is getting on wonderfully, and makes more money every year."

"But then, what can have made her do it?" said Lily thoughtfully; "poor, poor Nora!"

"Yes, indeed, she is to be pitied, if, as you say, she was educated in a convent and amongst girls of a better class," said an elderly gentleman; "the very fact of being severed from their society must be very painful to her."

"Poor Nora!" repeated Lily, but at the same moment her eye fell upon the countess, whose anxiety seemed to be growing quite feverish, and, thinking she was anxious about her son's health, she arose, saying, "Now I think we must force our naughty cousin there to reason. Come, Curty, it's more cosy in the drawing-room."

Every one, of course, followed the young hostess, but

somehow the drawing-room was not more cosy. The general good-humour seemed to have been dispelled as if by magic, and a "wet blanket" seemed to have fallen upon every one. The countess did not contribute to the general comfort by darting anxious looks at her son and angry ones at the chaplain; and to crown all, Curt had turned deadly pale, and lay back as if exhausted in an arm-chair, without uttering a word. A general break-up ensued, the company alleging that the convalescent needed repose.

As the Rittmeister arose to take leave, Lily asked him in a whisper, "Does the Circus Karsten remain much longer in Vienna?"

"As far as I can remember the last representation was announced a few days ago. But if you wish it, countess, I can send you more exact information."

"No, no, thank you," said Lily hastily, seeing that the countess was approaching. "I will see .... I now know" ....

The Rittmeister, seeing that she did not wish to carry the subject any further, took his leave.

"Now, do tell me, my dear sir, what on earth can have induced you to have alluded in so imprudent a manner to that Karsten girl, before Curt, too, so as to awake all the old reminiscences within him?" This was spoken by the countess to the chaplain in an irritable tone, when, after the departure of the guests, she found herself alone with him.

"Indeed, countess, I am quite sure that he has never forgotten anything, and that his present state is only caused by the same old sorrow," answered the chaplain gravely.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the countess, "the climate made him ill, and now the one thing to do is never to remind him of the past by any allusion to it. For my part,

I have always carefully avoided saying a word which might turn his mind to the subject. It's really too provoking," she continued in a still injured tone, "and I was so glad, too, of his being here on that very account!"

"You see, countess, we poor mortals can do very little with all our precautions, Count Curt and Miss Nora have met, and that quite lately."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the countess, "you don't mean it! How is it possible? How did it come about?"

"They met by accident in a railway carriage, as Count Curt was travelling here, and the shock of the meeting caused his relapse. You see, therefore, how far from forgetting her he is, and how powerful his love must still be."

"Alas! alas!" cried the countess. "And now, of all times, when I really thought that my plans were fitting so nicely into one another, and that he would be got into proposing to his cousin very soon."

"Dear countess, believe me and make no plans; you will only frighten him away altogether. Leave the whole matter in the hands of God, and depend upon it He will guide all for the best. You have nothing to fear from Miss Nora, as she has long since given up all kind of hope."

"Oh! if you had only not just contradicted that gentleman! I was so glad that Curt should hear the way in which she is spoken of."

"It was an untruth, and as such could not be allowed to stand," said the chaplain firmly, though gently, for he rather pitied the countess than not in her grief; "I am fully acquainted with all the sad details of the case, and it was my simple duty to speak as I did."

"Why couldn't you have let your connection with the family drop?" continued the countess peevishly, as if to vent her anger upon some one whomsoever it might be.

"I was so glad to think that we had done with them once and for all!"

"It was a question of looking after a soul, countess; and that, you know, is one of the duties of my vocation. I saw that the poor girl, beaten about by sorrow and bitterness, was on the point of falling into an abyss, and I endeavoured to give her comfort by my words and by my presence, and to save her before it was too late. Had it not been my duty as a priest, it would have been my duty as a man, for I promised her dying mother not to forsake her child, and, with God's help, I think I succeeded in my endeavour."

"Anyhow, she has not given up riding," observed the countess sharply. "I told you from the very beginning what an unfortunate idea it was to have her educated at the Convent of Brussels, and everything has happened as I had foretold. You may say what you like about it, but what am I to do with my poor son? Would he had remained away!"

"Do nothing at all," said the chaplain impressively. "Indeed, there has been already too much done in the matter. Your son's health and Miss Nora's happiness have already been sacrificed. It's so often the case that, when we run away from one misfortune in our over-anxiety, we fall into another."

But it was not an easy thing to make the countess alter her opinion.

CHAPTER XXI.

"WOULD he never be at rest?" This was the burden of Curt's thoughts during the long and sleepless night which succeeded the conversation in the foregoing chapter, the burden of his thoughts, too, when, more tired and more exhausted than usual, he sat in his favourite corner the next morning. Not even the fresh autumn air could cool his burning forehead. Since yesterday the waves were beating wildly about his heart, and, do what he would, it was impossible to calm them. Each word which had been spoken had left its burning mark upon his soul. Nor could he reconcile the light way in which her name had been spoken with the undiminished esteem the chaplain had expressed for her. According to the latter, not even the shadow of blame could fall upon her. What were the sad circumstances he had spoken of, and which had forced her to take that odious step? He tried in vain to solve the enigma, but he had no starting point. . . . . True; was not that his fault, had he not refused every explanation? Had he not condemned her unheard? And what prevented him now from going to the chaplain and asking him for an explanation?

Explanation! There was none, there *could* be none, for having broken her promise, and murdered his love with

her own hands, just after he had given her a new proof of his unaltered fidelity. Thinking over that hour in which he had held her so confidently in his arms, he would fain have cried out aloud with indignation and pain at having been thus taken in. Then, he swore in his great wrath that her name should never again pass his lips, that he would seek no sort of explanation; and the moment after he had sworn this oath, he caught himself once more brooding over the matter, and wondering what could have brought on such a change. He pressed his hand to his head, as if by so doing he could relieve it of the weight of its thoughts. At that moment the rustle of a gown made him look up; cousin Lily stood before him. He tried to wear a mask upon his face, for no one should learn the cause of his agitation, nor even notice that he was agitated. Thus, with a forced smile, he welcomed the little one in a friendly manner.

She sat down at his side, but *she*, too, seemed preoccupied, as if she were trying to put something into words and could not succeed in doing so. At last it came out in timid little jerks. "Curt, would you mind . . . . Would it not bore you very much to accompany me this afternoon . . . . for a few hours? I . . . . should like to drive out with you, but without your mother?"

This was an extraordinary proposal to come from Lily, and Curt seemed more astonished than pleased with it.

"A drive with you!" he said constrainedly. "Where to? You know, my dear little girl, that the smallest exertion fatigues me."

Lily drew a very long face at the cold water thrown by Curt upon her project, and said, almost crossly, "I thought a drive in such fine weather would have done you good; but, of course, if you think it would tire you" . . . . and she half raised herself on her chair as if to go.

Now, it hardly looks well for a gentleman who has been

the guest of a young lady for weeks, and who is treated by her—nay, even nursed by her—with more than common affection, to refuse her the first favour she asks of him. Curt saw how displeased she was, and at once regretted his unfriendly answer. There was nothing left for him but to assure her that he was at her orders to dispose of him as she wished.

Lily's face became at once radiant again, and she took him at his word.

"The drive will do you good," she again asserted, for her own tranquillity; but nothing would induce her to say where they would drive, or what the object of the drive was. "You must just do what I tell you, and take the rest upon trust. Later on, I shall tell you the reason why," she said with a sly look at him. "As to your mother, I will carry her by storm, only you must raise no objections, Curty."

Curty raised no objections. Once he had been obliged to give in, he had no interest in the matter one way or the other.

The countess was certainly much more astonished than Curt had been, at Lily's strange and mysterious proposal; it quite upset all her notions of propriety; but she was anxious not to prevent anything like intimacy between the two, so that she only emitted a few feeble remarks, which Lily quietly put down. The notion of coupling anything fast, or even extravagant, with the girl would never have crossed any one's mind, so that Countess Degenthal felt sure that the project could only be a very harmless one. Once again, the calm, quiet, young lady did exactly as she wished.

She was as proud as Punch, but with more dignity than that personage would have had under similar circumstances, as she rolled away in her carriage with her cousin at her side.

She felt in very high spirits, though somewhat damped by Curt's great apathy, and by his not evincing the smallest desire to know where he was being taken.

"Now, I must also tell you whither I am going to take you. We are going to Vienna, but not by rail, as that would be a pity in this beautiful weather. The horses can do it in two hours, so that we shall soon be there, and even after I have executed my commission, we shall have a few hours before us. I shall send the carriage back, and as, of course, you must not take a long drive in the evening, we will return by rail and be at home in good time. Haven't I arranged it all beautifully?"

Curt nodded his approval; there was no doubt that the drive was doing him good, and that it was more soothing to his nerves to be driving through the fresh and pure air, than it would have been to have spent that day in the society of his mother. By degrees he fell into a sort of half-dreaminess, whilst his little neighbour chattered on at his side.

Even before the two hours had elapsed, they had reached the town, and the horses stood snorting at the door of Lily's house. Everything was kept in perfect order, ready to be stepped into at a moment's notice, by the old butler who had now opened all the rooms for his young mistress.

Whilst Curt, who felt as if he had come out of a dream, was trying to explain to himself where he was, and whilst one by one the remembrances came back to him of all that had taken place in this town he had not visited since his journey to the East, Lily had been having a long and important discussion with the butler. Shortly afterwards the latter reappeared with a slip of paper on a silver *plateau* which he presented to her.

"Now, Curty," said Lily, "as soon as you are rested enough to be able to accompany me, please let us start. I want to go to this hotel, and we must go along these

streets," she added, showing him the paper she had just received.

Curt looked absently at it, in order to know his way, and then, taking up his hat, he went down with his cousin into the street, and offered her his arm. His mind was too full of reminiscences for him to give much thought to Lily's project.

"Probably some purchase or other with which she intends to surprise my mother," he said to himself.

Curt strode silently on at Lily's side, thinking of the last time he had walked along these streets, the morning when Nora had entreated him so earnestly not to go away and leave her. Perhaps she had been right —perhaps it was her woman's instinct which had told her that, had he remained within call, everything would have happened differently. It is true that he had left her quite alone, and without protection of any sort. . . .

"Here we are," said Lily suddenly, for she had in truth been leading the way. They were at the door of one of the best hotels in the town. "I have some one to speak to, and I shall find my way as soon as I am in the house itself, and then, Curty, be so good as to fetch me here in half an hour."

"Am I justified in allowing this?" asked Curt, now really taken aback at her unusual conduct. "I do think that in my character of jealous cousin, I ought to forbid such a mysterious *rendezvous*."

"And I forbid cousins dictating to me," laughed the girl. "But, indeed, Curty, when I've told you everything, as I will later on, you will see that I was quite right. Only, now, don't ask any questions, and just wait for me like a good boy; I shall be ready to the minute, indeed I shall." And saying this she looked up imploringly into his face.

Curt was like his mother, and could not for a moment doubt that whatever Lily's project was, it would prove a very harmless one. Moreover, punctuality was one of her great virtues. He let her go, and waited for her, strolling lazily up and down the streets; all he felt was that a town was an odious place, and that the numberless carriages rolling about, and numberless people rushing about, jarred singularly upon him. Exactly half an hour after she had left him, Lily once more appeared; and as soon as he espied her blue veil he hastened to take her under his protection.

"Well," he said as they walked away, "and have you set the threads of the great conspiracy agoing?" But as he looked at her face, he was surprised at seeing there unmistakable signs of tears.

"What's the meaning of this, Lily?" he said quite anxiously, and as he asked the question, she smiled at him with her wet eyes, and tucked her arm well into his.

"Now, I will tell you all," she said, as if with a sudden resolve. "It was very kind of you to do as I wanted without asking any questions. I've paid a visit to Nora Karsten."

Curt stood still and shuddered, as if shaken by some electric shock. "Nora Karsten? The beautiful Nora of the Circus?" he said in an incisive and bitter tone.

"Yes, Nora Karsten; why should you think that so very extraordinary? We were friends at school, and I never loved any one there as much as I loved her, for none were so good, so pious, or so loving. She saved me from many a punishment, comforted me in many a sorrow, and gave herself a great deal of trouble about me when I was quite home-sick. Indeed, I told her a thousand times that I would never forget her. It would have been extremely ungrateful of me had I given her up altogether because the poor girl had been obliged to appear in the

Circus. Of course, she only did that for her father's sake, that I am quite certain of. When I heard yesterday that she was here, but would soon be going away, I immediately made up my mind to hunt her out. Who knows where or when I shall see her again! I thought, moreover, that it was just the right moment to call upon her, and to show her that I had not ceased loving her all the same. I do think it such a shame to leave any one in the lurch because he or she is drawn down below a former station by some unfortunate event. Of course, your mother would never have allowed me to visit her, and I daresay you would also have thought it proper to make a few observations. But I was right all the same, wasn't I, Curty? You are not put out, dear?" she added, looking up anxiously in his face, the expression of which she could not read, his eyes being fixed to the ground.

What, indeed, were the thoughts which moved him at her simple and earnest words, and which made him step along beside her as if in a dream?

"Yes," he at last said with some difficulty, "God bless that good little heart of yours! And if you were mistaken about her, the mistake was a noble one."

"Oh! I am so glad you are not angry," she answered. "I do not so much mind what your mother thinks of me; but if you had scolded me, I should have been very, very sad. And you may be quite certain that I am not mistaken in Nora. She is just as good and as pious as ever—you know the chaplain said so yesterday—and you can't imagine how beautiful she looked! It was quite touching to witness her joy at seeing me again. Poor girl! she thanked me so lovingly; and I don't think she is happy—she cried so that she could hardly answer all my questions. To-day she has to ride again. Isn't it dreadful! I should hate seeing her there. I told her that you had accompanied me, for she asked after your mother and you. Perhaps

you've forgotten it, but you saw her in Switzerland when she was a little girl. She would not, however, allow me to call you in." Lily said all this in one breath, the success of her enterprise having made her quite eloquent.

She might have said a great deal more for aught Curt knew;—a sudden giddiness had seized him; he neither saw nor heard clearly; there was one image before him, that of Nora, the unsought for, who once more crossed his road. . . . . Was this the answer to the many doubts awakened since the day before? and would it be right to allow this new occasion to slip through his fingers?

The two had arrived at Lily's house, and Curt suddenly said, after having reconducted Lily to the drawing-room, "I hope you won't mind my leaving you a moment alone? I have something I should like to do, and which I have just thought of. We have two hours' time before us still."

"Oh, certainly," answered Lily. "I can wait for you very well; only please don't let us miss the train."

But Curt was already gone. He hurried down the stairs, and rushed out into the street as if he were afraid that by the loss of a minute he might change his determination. What did he want? What did he wish for? He himself hardly knew; anyhow he would not let the opportunity slip by him this time.

"Count Degenthal!" exclaimed Nora indignantly, as a few minutes later he stood before her. "Count Degenthal, you have no longer the right to visit me," and saying these words, she rose haughtily, with the intention of leaving the room, but her strength failed her, and she fell back in her chair.

"No longer the right!" he cried, trembling with passion from head to foot, and grasping hold of her arm with no gentle lover's grip. "Who has robbed me of this right?

Who has thrown away with contempt the most devoted and unselfish love which man ever felt for woman? Who has broken the faith we had sworn to each other, either out of a contemptible cowardice, or a still more contemptible vanity? O Nora! how I wish I could hate you!" And thus saying he threw roughly away the hand he had been so tightly pressing.

"Curt, Curt! you don't really believe in your own words, you can't know what you are talking about! Why, dear, all my bliss lay in my love," she moaned out in accents of despair.

"*Your* love!" he repeated, giving his bitterness full play. "Your love! which could not hold out for a few months. Your love! which could outlive nothing, and which gave way like a poor broken reed that it was at the very first difficulty."

These reckless and unjust words awoke the pride in her again, and rising, deadly pale, yet determined, she said clearly and distinctly, her lips trembling the while: "You have no right to judge me; you know you have not! I confided everything to you, and you returned my explanation unread."

The reproach bit him with all the power of truth, and as she now stood before him so grave, so beautiful, innocence stamped upon her lovely brow, her eyes, full of endless woe, raised fearlessly to his, the old flame burnt up afresh in him, do what he would to extinguish it. "Nora, Nora!" he cried, "oh! for pity's sake, tell me what made you do it? Do you suppose that I have not suffered? Only look at me, and see if I am not changed, see if it has not taken the very life out of me? Oh, my love, my love! what had I done that you should treat me thus?"

"Curt, forgive me. Indeed, it was not my fault, it was a dreadful sacrifice, but it had to be made! Why was not my life, instead of yours, destroyed by it?" And in her

despair she pressed her hands to her face, and rocked herself to and fro.

"As if my life were of any worth to me since that hour which drew all I had hallowed into the mud? And yet, Nora . . . Tell me all . . . Explain this dark mystery." He was silent—he could find no more words to express the agonised tumult of his feelings, but drawing her towards him, he now gently took her hands away from her face, and looked passionately into her eyes as if *there* the truth must be read.

"It's too late now," she whispered in a low moan, "for ever too late! O Curt! had you only been there!" and her head sank upon his shoulder, her hands clasped him in her wondrous grief, and she burst into tears.

"But I am here, Nora, I am with you now," he answered, deeply moved by her sorrow, and pressing his lips upon her hair; "all can be well again, nothing is too late for love."

"No, no, dear; the waves have closed over my head, not even you can save me now, one can't make a thing *unhappened.* You said yourself that I had been drawn into the mud, and I know it! I am unworthy of your love now. I dare not take it even if you would give it me . . . No, dear, go away and leave me . . . Why did you come back?"

"In order to ask for the explanation I have a right to hear, although I returned it once in a moment of madness. But my heart has known no rest since that journey which brought us so wonderfully together, and in which however so precious a time was lost. Anyhow, I will not let the moment given us go by now—no mystery, no intrigue, shall keep us any longer asunder. You know, darling, that you were worth the whole world to me. I will make you mine in the face of the whole world, whatever may have been done to raise this barrier between us.

But only speak—tell me all, my love, my own!" and he drew her still nearer to him.

"Indeed, you may not, you durst not," she said again. "It is too late." At the same moment she shuddered and disengaged herself suddenly from his arms. "There is some one coming," she said frightened and panting. "Oh, that horrible man, just at this moment! . . . Go,—I will tell you all, indeed I will, but now go, Curt!"

"Why?" he was just going to ask. But a knock at the door was already heard, and before he had time to turn, Landolfo had entered. A sardonic smile passed over his lips when he saw the two together.

"Count Degenthal, ah!" he remarked with a slight bow. "Miss Nora, I had come to fetch you for the representation."

"I thank you; my father always fetches me himself," she answered with icy coldness.

"Well, it so happens that it was your father who sent me to you. Had I known that you had such a pleasant visitor, I would not have ventured to disturb you," he answered with an impertinent stress on the words "such a pleasant visitor." "Perhaps you would prefer not to ride to-day. Shall I tell your father that?" . . .

And he remained standing there, and measuring Curt with a provoking look, as if he, and he alone, had a right to be with Nora.

"I will tell my father myself what my wishes are," said Nora. "Count Degenthal, I am afraid we must part," she said, turning to him, and offering him her hand.

Curt took it, and it lay cold and trembling in his.

"Well, then, I will go now, for my time is up, but I shall come in a few days. Nora," he said firmly, "all kinds of doubt must cease between us; reckon, therefore, upon me in a few days."

He laid a stress upon the words, as if to strengthen him-

self in his purpose, and also in order that this odious interloper might hear them.

Landolfo's only answer was a disagreeable and lowering smile.

Nora did not seem to notice him, or perhaps she did not wish to enter into any dispute with such a man. But there was a dreadful sadness, an almost incredulity, as she repeated his words—"In a few days." . . . For a moment, even, it seemed as if she had held out her hand to retain him.

Curt hurried away and hailed the first cab he saw. Although he had, in reality, learnt nothing, he felt as if a great load had fallen from his heart. He had seen her, he had spoken to her, and the ice was broken. He had read it in her noble face; it was only some dreadful misfortune which could have induced her to take such a step; she had called it a great sacrifice, and he was now convinced that some mistaken notion of duty had moved her to it. And should he throw her away from him, poor girl, because she had not been strong enough to overcome circumstances? And he wanted her love so, she was everything to him, and the old feeling came over him, the old boyish feeling, that she was placed under his protection. Love had conquered the day, and all his doubts were scattered to the winds.

Yes, he would return to her very soon, in a few days, as he had promised. To a man who, like himself, had been living during years in the most dreadful of uncertainties, it was one immense relief to have arrived at a decision of some sort, and he felt quiet at heart.

As he re-entered his cousin's drawing-room, he did not find her alone. A broad-shouldered man in a light travelling-costume, holding the most exotic of all Panama-hats in his hand, was sitting there. His round face, burnt quite

brown, and almost entirely concealed under a bushy beard, was turned away from the door.

"What! you, Dahnow!" exclaimed Curt in joyous surprise. "My dear fellow, where on earth do you come from?"

"Only from a little transatlantic tour, which lasted the short lapse of three years, and I am now in the hopes of turning into a European again," said Dahnow, heartily shaking his friend's hand. "Of course, I first of all dedicated myself to some of the scientific magnates in Vienna, in order to enlighten them by my singularly sharp remarks, and then I wanted to look you up before returning North. I inquired here, and was happy enough to learn that you were also spending a few hours in town; Countess Lily did me the charity of receiving me, and so, here you have my curriculum vitæ. I hear no very good news about you, old fellow. What an inconceivable loss of time to be ill when one is young! You seem, moreover, to have been exciting yourself and running about more than your charming nurse here would approve of," he added, noticing Curt's flushed face and beaming eyes.

"Oh dear! I hope you are not feverish!" said Lily, also surprised at the change which had taken place in Curt. "It would be too dreadful if the drive had done you harm; I would never cease reproaching myself with it."

"Don't worry, little one," he said, throwing himself on the sofa at her side. "It was an excellent idea of yours. I cannot tell you how thankful I am to you for it, and how much good the day has done me. No, don't spoil me like that," he added, pushing away the pillow which she, with true feminine care, was trying to arrange behind his back; at the same time he retained the hand which she had stretched out. "Dahnow, you've no idea what a dear, charitable, little hand this is," he said almost tenderly;

"and to what a good little creature it belongs. We men are real barbarians when compared to women, there's no doubt about that."

Curt was only alluding to Lily's staunch friendship for Nora, which had brought about his meeting with her.

Lily blushed deeply. "Don't talk such nonsense," she answered, drawing her hand shyly away.

"I don't think it is nonsense to him," said Dahnow, observing the two; "and, indeed, I'm not surprised that he should be in earnest in his gratitude towards so kind and sympathising a hostess."

In his heart of hearts Dahnow's thoughts ran thus: "The d—l! It evidently is my destiny! Here am I, after three years' absence, straight from the equator, just in time to find him on the point of popping the question. Poor Nora! He seems to have forgotten her completely, and my letter evidently did not bear much fruit. Of course, it's far more sensible thus, and happy the man who *can* be sensible! Enthusiasts of that kind can't live without mooning away for some one. But I wonder what's become of Nora!" This thought seemed to have stopped the general gush of his eloquence, so that he soon arose to take leave.

Lily had amiably invited him to visit his friend at Göhlitz, and he had accepted the invitation with pleasure.

Curt now whispered to him—"Do come, old fellow, I've something very important to tell you."

"As if I couldn't guess what that is," grumbled Dahnow to himself.

"Thank God! the drive has done you good," said Lily on her way home, after a scrutinising glance at her cousin's face. "You look better than when we drove away. And mind you, Curt, we will say nothing about the object of our drive. I am very grateful to you for having accompanied me."

"Oh no! It is I who am grateful to you," said Curt with feeling. "What you have done to-day showed me a very noble trait in your character. And, Lily dear, in a few days I will tell you something, and I shall reckon once more upon your true and fond heart for receiving my confidence with kindness." He was going to say more, but, blushing and confused, she had already sprung away from his sight.

CHAPTER XXII.

"IN a few days," thought Curt, after his eventful meeting with Nora. We often like to determine thus, a long-wished-for time, fancying, in our short-sightedness, that we make sure of the thing we desire; and yet the morrow is as uncertain to us as the most distant future.

"In a few days," thought Nora, and her heart trembled with hope. He had come, he intended to come again! It is true that there had been anger in his voice, and that he had exacted, rather than begged, an explanation. But all the same, love had won the day. Nora gave herself up to no false hope, and told herself, at every moment, that she would be firm, would accept no sacrifice at his hands, and would steadily refuse that to which she had no longer a right. Still the belief in happiness which dwells so obstinately in every young heart kept refusing to be put down, do what she would. It was delightful to think that she could once more allow him to read in her heart, knowing, as she did, that there was not one blot upon its pages. More than ever now did she thank God for having saved her from falling into the gulf which had once opened at her feet.

"In a few days," thought Curt, and he would fear nothing, and listen to no doubts of any kind. He was

quite clear as to what he would do: he would not let pride stand in his way, but he would believe in her, and not allow any one to rob him of his love.

"In a few days," thought Lily, as she laid her fair head upon her pillow, and hardly dared whisper to herself what she hoped a few days might bring forth for her. "When he is mine I will make him quite well again; he is much better since he came here," she added, with a dash of conscious pride; for Lily belonged to those women who say, when thinking of their lover: "He will be mine," not to those who say, "I shall be his." It is but a detail, still it is a very characteristic one.

What happened in a few days? There was suddenly a story spread about in the capital, a scandalous story, too, which on that very account was considered amusing, and excited much curiosity.

The busy tongues of idle people were set a-wagging —all the more as the scandal related to well-known individuals.

The representation of that evening in the Karsten Circus was unexpectedly interrupted, as was said, on account of the director's sudden illness. The complete disorder which had taken place among the members of the troop, their excited gesticulations, the non-appearance of Landolfo, who had always replaced the director in such cases, gave rise to strange and dark reports. Soon afterwards the news spread that the director had had an attack of apoplexy, consequent upon the shock he had received by the elopement of his daughter with his agent. Different versions spread like a house on fire: some were highly tragic, some of the lowest comedy. A few timid people suggested that it was the wife, and not the daughter, of the director, who had eloped; but their mouths were at once stopped by public opinion, as it was a well-known fact that the beautiful Nora and the handsome Landolfo were attached

to each other. As for the director's wife, she was a very faded beauty, and so the matter was settled.

The papers soon got hold of it. The scandal was told and retold with every possible detail, but the reason of the elopement remained a mystery—for as far as people knew, nothing had stood in the way of their union. Soon afterwards, however, it became public that the agent had proved himself unworthy of his charge, and had simply robbed the director very extensively.

Some of the director's particular patrons, as well as some of those patented fishers of news who exist in every large as well as in every small town, went themselves to the hotel at which the director was staying, in order to extricate something more positive. But they were rather disappointed; for it appeared that immediately after the event, the two remaining members of the family had barricaded themselves against any intrusion. It was only reported that the doctor had declared Mr. Karsten to be very dangerously ill, and had added that, even if his life were saved, he would long remain an invalid.

The head waiter shrugged his shoulders and raised his eyebrows in a mysterious manner, which showed that he knew a great deal. When examined as to the reason of the director's sudden attack, he spoke of various misunderstandings having taken place of late in the Karsten family. The housemaid had told him of a violent quarrel the director had had with his daughter, and then the head waiter smiled, as one does about such delicate matters, and made his interlocutor understand that the director's breakfast had of late been a somewhat . . . well . . . heavy one, which probably did not agree with his constitution. When the director was tired, or, in short, forced to repose himself for a time, Mr. Landolfo had been in and out every moment of the ladies' drawing-room. The porter remembered perfectly, one certain afternoon, having seen

one of the ladies come down-stairs with Landolfo. She was dressed in a travelling-costume, and wore a very thick veil. She then entered a cab which was waiting at the door, and accompanied by Mr. Landolfo had driven away at once. Mr. Landolfo, however, used often to accompany the ladies to the rehearsals, so that the porter was not surprised. It was only that evening that a great agitation had evidently reigned in the family at No. 36, and the doctor had been hastily called in. But since then, he repeated, nothing had transpired, as the lady allowed no one, not even a servant of the hotel, to enter the room, and evidently only devoted herself to her sick husband and to her child. Any sort of pursuit of the flying pair had not even been thought of.

This was not much, and yet the eager gossipmongers had to be satisfied with it. Anyhow, the last shadow of a doubt as to the personality of the lady run away with—which was supposed to have come from the doctor—fell to the ground, for it seemed quite impossible that the mother should have left her son.

The whole matter would very soon have been forgotten, as gossip soon is, when it has done its dread work, had not the papers given it a new turn, and a particularly interesting one, as it concerned "members of good society." A paragraph appeared which threw fresh light upon the cause of the elopement. The writer was very exact in his details, and seemed to be very sure of his facts. There had been a love affair between the beautiful Nora and a young Austrian count. The name of the latter could easily be guessed at, being indicated by three letters discreetly filled up by dots. The beginning of the affair had taken place three years ago. Of course, the young lady's father had encouraged this inclination, and thereby reduced the D....t..l family to despair. The young man had been sent out to a distant diplomatic post in the hopes of thus

breaking off the engagement. Even then the director had given himself a great deal of trouble to retain his daughter's aristocratic lover, and had lent himself to various secret meetings. It was only when at last he saw he could no longer oppose the family's determined opposition that he allowed his daughter to appear in public, and had ceased to oppose his agent's affection for her; nay, he had even promised him her hand. Be it from disappointment and pique against her faithless lover, or be it out of caprice, the beautiful Nora had also given him her consent, and her engagement to him became a generally known thing.

Suddenly, however, Count D. had reappeared on the scenes, and had once more paid his addresses in the warmest manner to his former love. The father, hoping after all to see his daughter bear a title, had quarrelled with his agent, and had dismissed him. The latter, however, had used his own right upon his bride-elect, and had saved her by flight from all future intrigues. It was left in doubt whether this had been done with the beauty's full and free consent or not. Two days before the elopement, Mr. L. had actually surprised Count D. on a visit to the young lady.

The story was so delightfully confused, so cleverly composed of probabilities and improbabilities, that the few contradictions in it were forgotten, and the readers were only struck by the fact that one of the greatest families of the land was mixed up in it.

Thus was opened a grand source for uncharitable suppositions, for still more uncharitable rejoicings over a neighbour's misfortune, and for that kind of sympathy which unhappy people do so much better without. One remembered this and that; one put together the disappearance and the reappearance of Count Curt; and certain reports, which had at the time blown over from the Rhine,

made the whole thing quite plausible. Mothers who had reckoned upon him for their daughters remembered his coldness towards young ladies—indeed, that was always a bad sign; young men, for whom he had been set up as a model, now laughed at the illusions of their elders, and made witty jokes at prudish Nora's expense; and old gentlemen brought their heads together, and wondered if something ought not to be done considering that one of their society was thus publicly compromised. The world takes things lightly, and closes its eyes willingly to a great deal, so long as it is allowed to *ignore;* but its revenge becomes all the more bitter when the scandals are made public, and when it is called to pass judgment upon them. Those who led society, those who, if we may so speak, showed the colours which well-bred people should wear, went about with long and severe faces; the poor mother was very much pitied; and kind people, as the world goes, had a notion that there was a great deal of calumny about the story, but, of course, they were convinced that the report was not completely devoid of truth, for, added those who were fond of citing French proverbs, "Il n'y a pas de fumée sans feu."

At Göhlitz the news fell like a clap of thunder upon its inmates. The countess, however, asserted that she had not been in the least surprised at reading of Nora's elopement with Landolfo in her morning paper, and she handed it over at once to Lily as a proof that she had better have held her tongue whilst the Karsten girl was being discussed.

It was difficult for Lily to be very much excited, but she was so now, as far as it lay in her nature.

"That's not true, it can't be true," she repeated firmly. "Nora is much too good and too pious to do anything of the kind."

"My dear child, people alter considerably according to

the atmosphere they live in," returned the countess gravely.

"But Nora is not in the least changed," assured Lily. "It was a dreadful sorrow to her to enter upon such a career; she only did it out of love for her father."

"And pray how do *you* happen to know all this?" asked the countess sharply, and looking at her fixedly.

Lily turned very red, but, remembering her complete independence, she looked bravely up at her aunt, and said, "Because I saw her and spoke with her a few days ago. My only object in undertaking that drive with Curt was to see her, and I found her at home."

"With Curt! You mean to say that you took Curt to her!" gasped the countess in a hoarse whisper, so that even Lily was surprised at the deathly palor which overspread her face.

"Not with Curt; I only wanted him to accompany me, as I did not wish to confide the matter to Miss Richthoven. Curt only learnt the object of our trip after I had seen Nora; but he didn't reproach me in the least; on the contrary, he said I had been quite right."

"He didn't see her, then?" asked the countess somewhat relieved.

"No; as I said before, he only led me to her hotel, without knowing whom I was going to call upon. Moreover, I do not see that there could be anything improper in my undertaking a drive with a distant cousin with whom I have been brought up," added the little mistress of the house in an offended tone, after which she left the room.

Upon the whole, the countess was glad that it should be thus, and that Lily should have thought that her anger was directed merely against the drive. It had prevented her asking for any other explanation.

But the chaplain had, perhaps, been right; and all her

care had been useless. Was it impossible, after all, to keep the reins in one's hands? But yet she could not spare her son this last bitter drop. For a moment she thought of concealing it from him, but then again she judged it better to let him know, once for all, the whole ugly truth, especially after the ideal nonsense which had been given vent to before him.

It was much better to take things as they were from their matter-of-fact point of view.

She therefore sent the newspaper at once up to her son, thinking the while that a burnt wound heals more quickly than another one.

Yes, indeed, it was a burning and a probing of the wound, this dreadful news which reached Curt at a time when a little peace had entered into his heart. He stared at the newspaper and gnashed his teeth. He did not say, like Lily, "It is not true!" Oh no; he had nurtured suspicion too long against the once beloved, and his love had been too deeply shaken to its very foundations. He did not faint as once of yore; he had grown too much accustomed to sorrow and to shocks, and now he was sure that all his faith and all his trust had been placed unworthily.

Betrayed. . . . Once more betrayed! So this was the word of the enigma! This was the answer to his question! "Too late, for ever too late," she had said, and this was the reason why! He had seen this man enter her room as if he had a right to do so. He had noticed the creature's sarcastic look, his cold smile of contempt, and her pale and trembling face. Yes, he remembered now how he had seen him waiting for her at the station, always in order to assert his right over her. It was all clear to him now. Truly, she had not said too much when she had said that she had been dragged into the

mud; she was dragged there, indeed, if she could fall a prey to such a man.

And he, he had sworn in his senseless passion that he would raise her to himself again, that he would once more press his treasure to his heart, believing, poor fool, that the treasure was intact, although it had for a time mixed with trumpery. Another thought took possession of him; he must away, he must hide his sorrow, his shame, from those he knew. It seemed to him as if every one could read upon his brow all that had passed within his heart during the last few days, and that every one would have the right to laugh loudly at his credulity, at his foolish weakness. Above all, his mother should not see him in such a moment.

When the countess asked for her son he was no longer in Göhlitz. The footman announced that the count had received important news which compelled him to start off at once; he had gone to the station on foot, and would either write or return in a few days.

The countess was overpowered, and feared lest she had once more acted too hastily. Lily also hung her fair little head and seemed very sad, she had so wanted to confide her distress to her cousin.

For Countess Degenthal, troubles were not yet at an end. One afternoon her old friend the Excellency appeared, wearing a grave and consequential face, and begged the countess to allow him the great honour of having a secret conference with her. The Excellency had grown somewhat older, but he was still a busy man, fond of handling delicate questions. As he told the countess in a very well-turned phrase he felt himself authorised, or rather he felt it a duty, as one who had been honoured by the friendship, and even once by the confidence of the countess, to acquaint her with the paragraph which had drawn her son's name before the public, as well as with all the

unpleasant things which had been consequently said. The countess was at her wits' end; fate was certainly against her; she had done all that lay in her power in order to prevent those two names being spoken in one breath, and now they were dragged together in such a manner before the whole world!

When the Excellency had reported all he knew, she felt quite sick at heart, and the paragraph which he gave her to read made her fume with indignation. She would willingly have denied everything, but how could she do so, knowing that Curt had been in town a few days before the elopement? She was moreover obliged to confess that he had left Göhlitz on receipt of the news, and she did not know whither he had gone. Perhaps he was still more deeply implicated in this miserable affair than she had a notion of. She now considered everything possible. As for the Excellency, his face grew longer and longer; of course, he would try to use his influence in order to cause the matter to be hushed up as soon as possible. But, alas! there was no denying that Count Curt had been extremely imprudent.

"That all comes of independent young ladies driving about alone," said the countess that evening to her niece, giving vent to her anger and bitterness, by telling her everything from beginning to end. She felt it was impossible that it should now remain a secret to her, and she showed her the paragraph which had appeared in the newspaper. In doing so, she was far too miserable to spare her niece's feelings, especially as she now thought everything was lost. The young girl listened quietly to what the countess said, and then read the odious paragraph.

"Of course, there is not more truth in this than there was in Nora's elopement," she then said; for, as we know, Lily never gave up an idea she had once taken hold of, and never lost the confidence she had once placed in a person.

"Neither Nora nor Curt would have behaved so. Some one has written that who had a particular reason for hating them. Curt must, of course, be made aware of this, so as to be able to refute it."

"God bless your obstinate little head," thought the countess to herself, irritated at the simple way in which Lily tried to explain so complicated a thing. Of course, Countess Degenthal knew the world better than Lily, and knew that everything was possible, and foresaw the consequences attendant on the possibility. But for the first time in her life she found no answer to her self-made question, "What is to be done?" For the first time, too, Lily asked herself what she could do, moved as she was by pride and love. She thought over it during many an hour. Curt, then, had loved Nora! that was the reason why he had been so unhappy, so ill, and had remained so long away from home. . . . But there is something so congenial to a young girl's heart in a deep and unhappy love, that the fact did not in the least make her dislike Curt. Nora was so beautiful, so good, that she could quite understand Curt's love and Curt's sorrow; she understood it all the better as her good sense made her add—"Of course, he can't marry the poor girl; that's quite out of the question. I am so sorry for him, for, of course, he must have suffered deeply, and that is the reason why he is gone away." She pondered during a long time over the means of comforting him, and of so far mending matters that he should not remain a long time away, or perhaps, what would be still more dreadful, fly once more altogether from home.

Suddenly a bright idea crossed her mind; she would consult the chaplain; he would certainly be able to do some good. He knew Curt as well as Nora, knew everything that had happened to both, and also knew that Curt had only been once with her to Vienna, and that consequently there was no truth in the odious calumny made

by the newspapers. With the instinct of a loving heart, she guessed that he had only sought solitude in order not to be seen and observed after this dreadful catastrophe.

"I would have done exactly the same," thought Lily, and rejoiced in her confidence that she was not the person he had dreaded to meet.

"He was on the point of telling me everything; of course, that was what he meant, and I can perfectly enter into his feelings."

Yes, she understood him perfectly, this might easily be deducted from the simple and almost child-like letter she now wrote the chaplain, and in which she showed at every line how firmly she believed in Curt, how anxious she was about his welfare, and how truly she loved him. She enclosed the calumnious paragraph, and begged the chaplain to do all that was possible in order to spare her poor cousin further unpleasantness, and to make everything as bearable as possible to him, so that he should not fall ill again. Like a tidy little body as she was, she also enclosed the letters which had come lately for Curt, thinking the while there might be something in them which the chaplain should know.

As soon as the letter was gone, Lily felt once more at peace; the only thing which still troubled her a little was the fear Curt would go away again and remain a long time away. She had guessed rightly: like the poor wounded stag who flies into its well-known thicket and hides itself from all eyes, Curt wished to live out his pain in the solitude of his old home. He was forced to go through the capital, and for a moment he had hesitated and thought he would, perhaps, inquire into the matter there. But the news seemed too certain to be doubted, and Nora was too well known for any mistake to have been made. It would be worse than all to hear the affair

spoken of by other people; and then, why should he doubt it? Had he not seen the man, had he not heard her say that it was too late? She had confessed it, and his passion had refused to believe it. What he had mistaken for love and faith, was only bitter contrition and the few remaining sparks of her former self. "I have received my explanation quickly enough," he thought with a bitter smile, and he went on his way without stopping in the capital.

The household at the castle were extremely surprised by the unexpected arrival of the young count. It had been proposed that he should be received with great pomp and great rejoicings, this young master of theirs, when he should return home after such a long absence, and after having gone through so dangerous an illness. The countess, probably in order to excite no suspicion, had written home that he was perfectly recovered; and now the people shrugged their shoulders, and said to one another, "Is that what the countess calls being perfectly recovered?" Pale, grave, quiet, and exhausted, he could hardly draw his limbs after him, and he, usually so friendly and so cordial, hardly gave a nod to his old attendants.

He had completely lost his friendliness and ease of manner, and when his agents appeared before him he only addressed them a few short, cold, and indifferent words. Even to the chaplain he did not open his heart, and only faintly alluded to his dislike for festivities, as if that were the cause which had made him arrive so unexpectedly.

The chaplain, who had no notion of what had taken place, thought he was fighting out some inward combat, and left him alone.

Yes, alone! Shut up in his room as a recluse in his cell, he remained alone; alone, too, did he ride about

over the country, or cross his woods on foot; always alone. Those who saw him shook their heads, and the old servants prophesied evil, from the change which had come over their bright and joyous young master. Even the chaplain began to think such conduct inexplicable, until at last Lily's letter cleared up the mystery.

He disbelieved the contents of the paragraph as firmly as Lily had disbelieved them, but yet he was deeply moved by it, knowing the world as he did, and knowing how long it would be before all trace of the calumny would be washed away.

The chaplain now determined to break the ice. He went to Curt, and found him in his room standing by the window, his hand pressed upon his forehead, and looking out dreamily upon the green trees, and upon the blue skies, looking at them, but not seeing them. The chaplain gave him at once the letters which had come for him.

Curt looked at them rapidly, and threw them all aside, with the exception of one which bore Dahnow's handwriting.

He then looked up questioningly at the chaplain, for he saw that he had something more for him. The latter handed him the newspaper together with Lily's letter, which he considered would do the most towards soothing him.

Curt read the paragraph, and then all the pent-up anger of the foregoing days broke out with a violence and a rage, until that moment unknown to his sweet temperament. He crushed up the paper passionately, and threw it, with gnashing teeth, away from him, he burst out into a loud laugh.

"Serves me right! Who touches pitch shall be defiled. In my folly I took rotten wood for bright stone,

and now I have my reward. Serves me right, I say! I chose to have to do with *canaille*, and now I am treated as such myself. And all that for the sake of a pair of dreamy eyes! Why don't you laugh at me, chaplain? Laugh at me, do, as the whole world will. You don't even know what I was on the point of doing! I was on the point of marrying that creature! Why don't you laugh, chaplain? But you were also mistaken; you also spoke of your undiminished esteem for her. Ah, ah!" and he laughed again.

"Curt," answered the chaplain gravely, "will you tell me how much truth there is in the assertion that you once more approached her? As for the rest, of course, Nora is as innocent of it all as you yourself are."

"Innocent? Yes, indeed, she looks so immensely innocent that I did not believe her own words; she was at all events sincere enough to tell me that it was too late."

"You saw her, then?"

"Yes, I saw her!" said Curt peevishly. "I went to her after Lily had called upon her. I wished to silence my conscience, and to free myself from the reproach of having condemned her unheard. I wanted to save her if it were possible, and would even now have risked everything for her, so pure and so noble I thought her. Oh, my God! fool that I was! I loved her so intensely!" The words broke forth from him in his deep despair.

"And you met that man there?" asked the chaplain in his quiet way. "Then, probably, the paragraph has been inspired by low hatred and by irritated jealousy. Tell me, Curt, how it all came about."

Curt told him in a few disjointed words.

"*She* told you that it was too late? She promised you an explanation, and yet pressed you to go away? Those are, indeed, strange words. Oh, what can have induced

this poor girl for the second time to take so dreadful a step?"

"Appearance, comedy, show!" cried Curt bitterly. "She has played her part well from the very beginning. Oh! my mother was fearfully right when she prophesied that education would only make her more fit to lead an intrigue."

"Don't be as reckless in your hatred as you were in your love," said the chaplain severely. "It is extremely difficult for us to form a right judgment in this case; and often when we believe our opinions the most founded, they are the least so."

The chaplain durst not say any more, he would not awaken the old love which, after all, had not died away yet, nor would he add to the anger which he considered unjust.

"Read your cousin's letter," he said after a few minutes of reflection, "we will talk the matter over later on, and see what had better be done to put an end to such low scandal."

"My position in society is completely lost," cried Curt, breaking out again.

"It is pleasant to no one to lose ground anywhere," he said, "and although one may not prize certain things very highly, it is all the same disagreeable to lose them."

Curt knew his circle very well, and he knew what an effect the story would produce upon it. "My poor mother!" he added, picturing to himself her wounded pride, and feeling full of contrition for having brought himself into such a position by not having followed her advice.

The chaplain tried to soothe him. "After all, these are only calumnies, and you are quite innocent. Don't go to the capital for some time—your delicate health is a sufficient reason for keeping away—and then the gossip will be forgotten, as all such gossip is. Meanwhile, I will take the necessary steps for arriving at the particulars of

the case, and will see that the untruths contained in the paragraph are denied, I am quite sure that that man whom you met at Nora's is also the writer of the paragraph. . . . Poor, poor girl!" and the chaplain heaved a sigh, thinking of how her life had been ruined; and how, being laid out, as it were, for happiness, there had grown in it nothing but sorrow and misery. Yes, indeed, God's ways were unfathomable. But he reckoned upon Nora's high character and upon the pure motive which had first led her to enter upon that dreadful career. Such a sacrifice as she had made could not have been made by an ignoble woman. He believed there must be some misunderstanding, although, indeed, the facts seemed crushing. "It is strange," he thought, "to mark how all her life is constantly and mysteriously to be crossed by some dreadful misfortune. But her mother's last prayer was not that she should be happy here below, but that she should be saved hereafter. Whatever the road may be, she will be saved, so please it God. His flowers can bloom anywhere."

Curt had remained a prey to the greatest agitation, but perhaps this was preferable to the dreadful doubts and uncertainties of the foregoing days. He had had a vague presentiment that after all he might be mistaken as he had once been, or at least as he had thought he had been; nor could he rid himself of the remembrance of the love and of the innocence which had seemed to emanate from Nora's whole person. But now he was quite certain, he was indignant too, and he would give full play to his indignation.

He took up Lily's letter, and the simple and loving words which he there read touched him deeply. "Good, faithful, little creature!" he exclaimed, moved at the remembrance that he had given her nothing, and that she had given him all; whilst the other one had only returned ingratitude, as he thought, and ill-usage, for the whole life he had wished to lay at her feet. Again he repeated:

"Good, faithful, little creature," and looked again almost tenderly at the somewhat stiff and unpractised handwriting. It was pleasant to think of her now. There was something which rested him about the simple and everyday sort of life she led—something soothing in circumstances which had nothing complicated about them, and in a life which flowed tranquilly along as a gentle stream.

That other girl's life was so entangled, so torn about from side to side, and, like a torrent passing over stones and dust and mud, it drew through the mud all those who wished to follow it in its restless and unhallowed career. Lily's peaceful path had something inexpressibly attractive for him. . . . There are hours of total weariness in which the common beaten track pleases us more than the most enchanting wilderness.

Weary—yes, that was the word—Curt was weary of the inward combat which had lasted so long; he was weary of all these exciting feelings which had beaten him about like the waves of the sea, and placed him sometimes on the heights of happiness and then again precipitated him into the deepest depths of misery. He longed for the port; he longed to have his life settled down where there would be perhaps no new hopes, but also no disenchantments.

He seized mechanically hold of Dahnow's letter, which, to his surprise, bore a North German stamp.

"These lines," he wrote, "will, I hope, serve to excuse my having broken my promise, and not gone to Göhlitz, after Countess Lily and you having so kindly invited me. Please be my interpreter with your amiable cousin, and accept yourself my regrets—although, to tell the truth, I suppose that you will not have missed me much. Unless I am greatly mistaken, you are both in that pleasant state of mind which makes one give up visits very resignedly. Pray, allow me, as the oldest friend you have, to wish you joy beforehand. The moment in which a man makes up

his mind as to where and how his real happiness lies, is one in which one may sincerely congratulate him. You seem both of you to be quite settled on that point. I sincerely rejoice at your decision, for nothing is more sad than when a man cannot make up his mind to bury his grief or to accept his happiness. In the expectation, therefore, of soon hearing the good news from yourself,—I remain, your affectionate old friend,

"DAHNOW."

This letter completed the current of Curt's thoughts.

How sweet was the love of which he could not doubt, and which had thought of him constantly and always! It was pleasant, too, just now to think of so easy a success, for he was quite sure that, whatever the world might say, she would not hesitate for a moment. And then a man can never quite forget the matter-of-fact side of a question, and he knew that his engagement to Lily would be the most simple answer to all the gossip.

"Good, faithful, little creature," he said once more; and if it was not love, it was at any rate gratitude, which beat in his heart at the thought. And yet it was another form—they were other eyes—which arose before him as he lay tossing about on his pillow that night. But Dahnow's words came to him as a charm —"Nothing is more sad than when a man cannot make up his mind to bury his grief or to accept his happiness." Well, he would do both now! But he had not a notion that as Dahnow had written those words they had been extremely painful to him to write.

"I can't go and see him making up to another, that's quite above me; and now I'll be hanged if I don't try and find out what's become of that other girl."

The day after his conversation with Curt, the chaplain was very much astonished at receiving from the young

count a note, which consisted of these few words: "I start to-day for Göhlitz. Perhaps I shall go abroad afterwards, but I shall make up my mind about that whilst at Göhlitz. Anyhow, you will hear from me in a few days. Pray for me.

"D."

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHILST all this was taking place, a pale and sorrowing girl was sitting by her father's bedside—her father, who lay there senseless, having been struck down by a fit of apoplexy. Now and then she arose from her seat and went into the adjoining room, where a little boy knelt all alone on a chair and pressed his chubby face against the window-panes.

"Will mamma *never* come back?" he asked of Nora, who then took the child on her knees, and, looking into the handsome face, which resembled her father's and her own, and stroking the curly head, tried to comfort him as best she could. As soon as papa would be better, she would be able to play with him. Now, he must try to be quiet and good; as for mamma, she had gone on a journey. As she said this, poor Nora's cheek and brow were suffused with a deep blush of shame.

The fearful catastrophe had not fallen quite unexpectedly upon her, for she had seen how these two unworthy creatures had become intimate of late. On her step-mother's side, passion and a want of reflection had led her on to crime, whilst Landolfo had as usual based the whole infamous intrigue upon a mere mercenary calculation.

His plan to obtain Nora's hand, and thus become at first

the partner and then the successor of the director, had been shipwrecked upon the rock of resistance he had found so hard. Had she not even had one great love in her heart, she would never have encouraged Landolfo's advances, for he was inexpressibly antipathetic to her, feeling as she did that it was he who had marred her life's destiny.

Meanwhile, Landolfo's love—if his passion deserved that name—had turned to hatred of the bitterest kind, not only against Nora, but against her father, whom he suspected of being her secret ally. Nora had, indeed, threatened that she would retire if Landolfo were allowed to continue persecuting her with his addresses. Landolfo then tried to awaken her jealousy by paying his court to the director's wife. The latter, a silly and vain woman, was highly flattered at her conquest, notwithstanding Nora's beauty, which generally placed her completely in the shade. Her life was a very monotonous one. The director, what with his business and the indifference of advancing years, took very little notice of her. Even home luxuries were no longer what they had been during the days at Bonn, for since his great failure the director was obliged to economise. There was some compensation for her in being able to return to her former habits, and Landolfo at once saw that she could serve his end in a new plan his fertile brain had formed. Mrs. Karsten was all the more flattered at his marks of devotion, that she was at that disagreeable age for coquettish women, when charms are diminishing whilst the desire to please is still in full force; and she soon became a pliable instrument in Landolfo's hands.

The director, preoccupied by other matters, took no notice of all this. Landolfo had, moreover, encouraged his inclination for drink to that extent, that he was often, during the whole day, incapable of clear thought.

The pecuniary part of the enterprise was completely under Landolfo, and the director placed entire confidence

in him. Not so Nora, who had already been warned against him.

The hints she had thrown out when in conversation with the chaplain alluded to this low drama, which filled her daily more and more with a deep disgust. But as all she said was only laughed at by her father, who attributed her hints and remarks to her dislike for Landolfo, there had been nothing left for her to do, but to shut her eyes and pray in silence and in woe.

Curt's reappearance had brought Landolfo's plan to a crisis. He thought that some great turn would soon take place, and that all his hopes would be defeated. Now he would give full play to his hatred, and gain his advantage at every cost. His dishonesty in money matters could not be concealed much longer, so that he determined to make the director powerless by dealing his honour a deadly blow. He was too well acquainted with Karsten's pride, to doubt for a moment that he would not rather bear any pecuniary loss, than drag his honour into the mud of public degradation.

He had frightened weak Mrs. Karsten, threatening to reveal that she had been so long an accomplice in his thefts, by her silence, and on the other hand, he made all sorts of bright visions glitter before her eyes, which would turn to reality if she consented to go with him. He assured her, that Karsten's rival would be delighted to receive these runaways from the circus, and would prove his satisfaction by the large salaries he would pay. Passion, fear, and the prospect of a brilliant and amusing life, triumphed even over her love for her child, and after a few more round sums taken from the director's cash-box, the pair had eloped in the manner related by the waiter.

Landolfo satisfied his revenge against Nora, by causing false reports to be spread, so that, as we have seen, one person was mistaken for the other. He was sure that, in

this way, all chance of union with Degenthal would be at an end. The paragraph which had thrown a doubt upon Nora's as well as upon Curt's good fame had emanated from his pen. Of course, the public might not believe all that this paragraph contained, and, later on, some explanation might come; but Landolfo knew the world, and he knew that the false impressions would never be quite effaced—on the principle: "mentez, mentez toujours, il en restera bien quelque chose."

The same day Nora had been exposed to a violent scene with her father, who had heard of Degenthal's visit through Landolfo. This had upset the poor girl so completely, that she was unable to appear as usual at the Circus, and her non-appearance added to the evidence against her.

She was alone in her room that evening, trying to rest her weary head, when a sound like that of a fall, in the next room, considerably alarmed her. Hurrying into the room, she found her father lying unconscious on the floor, and nervously clasping a crumpled note in his right hand. He had come to fetch his wife for the representation, when the porter met him with the news, that one of the ladies had already driven away with Signor Landolfo. Surprised at so unusual an occurrence, he had rushed to his wife's apartment, and had found his boy sleeping as soundly as a child alone can sleep, but all the cupboards and drawers open and almost empty.

A letter was on the table, filled with such cold commonplaces as the following—"My heart can no longer put up with your indifference, and has, therefore, given itself up to one who really loves and understands me. Moreover, my talent as an artist is completely forced into the shade by your tyranny, and I feel compelled by it to seek an arena where it will be duly appreciated." Epistolary style was evidently not Mrs. Karsten's strong point! She

added a few more phrases, in which she confided her child to him, and hoped that he would make up to the son for his ill-treatment of the mother.

It is questionable whether the director perused these lines, or understood their meaning. It was only later on, when by degrees consciousness returned to him, that he realised how infamously he had been taken in. Anger, indignation, nay, fury, then took possession of him, and he fell into an apoplectic fit, such as he had already had a slight touch of in former days.

Nora, poor girl, soon realised what had taken place, and her first thought was to destroy every sign and paper which might make her father's shame public. This was her foremost preoccupation, so that, later on, she only allowed the doctor and her old Hannah to enter the room, in a sort of wild fancy that, by preventing any great fuss being made, she could also prevent the fact being known. She had hoped that her father had only had an ordinary fainting fit, but the doctor's grave face soon convinced her of the contrary.

The first days went by in breathless, feverish anxiety, and in the most devoted watching and nursing on her part. Then other worries of a different kind fell upon the wretched girl in these hours of sorrow. By the illness of the director, and the disappearance of Landolfo, the troop had lost all sort of leadership.

Nora had presence of mind enough not to let any one know that her father was totally unconscious, and, placing the direction into the hands of an elderly member, she transmitted her orders to him, leaving the company under the impression that it was the director who issued these orders. This went on pretty well for a short time, but Landolfo's thefts became daily more evident, and as he had mostly stolen from the salaries due to the troop, the matter became so complicated, the discontent so manifold, that

even to Nora with her energetic mind the task seemed above her strength. Her great preoccupation was to avoid bringing the law to bear upon this sad business, dreading, above all things, the shame of publicity.

How she longed and thirsted for advice! For some one to stand by her and hold her out a helping hand! It certainly crossed her mind that Curt had said he would return in "a few days," but these few days had long gone by. Perhaps he had called or sent her a word of sympathy, and that, in the general confusion, his name or his message had not reached her. She inquired after those who had called, and a few, very few, cards of indifferent people were brought to her. For a moment she had thought of writing to the chaplain, and of begging him to advise and help her; but a feeling of pride kept her back. She would not, in any way, appear to seek the Degenthal family. One day, however, her heart bounded within her as a visitor was announced; but a look thrown at the card caused a bitter disappointment to betray itself on her features.

"Baron Dahnow!" Ay! That was the good stout Mecklemburger, whom she had almost forgotten amidst the ups and downs of her life. She was on the point of sending him word that she was at home to no one, when these few words, written in pencil upon the card, made her pause in her intent: "Should Miss Nora be in want of a friend or adviser, she will surely allow an old acquaintance the honour of offering her his services."

Notwithstanding her disappointment, these kind and friendly words fell as a balm upon her distracted heart, and she felt that God had sent her the friend and adviser she had so pined after. She felt it all the more when, sitting before him, she gazed upon the calm and resolute expression of the Mecklemburger's face, and recognised in those bright and twinkling little eyes of his all the clear-

sightedness, firmness, and intelligence necessary to help her through the labyrinth she was placed in. Full of her own thoughts, Nora did not notice the deep emotion which overpowered Dahnow as she arose to meet him.

Perhaps it was in order to conceal this emotion that he bent low, and respectfully pressed his lips upon the hand she held out.

It was a little thing, perhaps, this outward sign of respect, but it did Nora a world of good.

"Can I ever thank you sufficiently, Baron Dahnow?" she said, her voice trembling. "How *could* you guess that I was so sadly in want of help and of advice?"

Dahnow's explanation was a very simple one. He had casually passed through Vienna, and, having heard of her father's illness, had called upon her, in order to offer her his services as was the duty of an old friend.

It would, perhaps, have been more difficult for the good Mecklemburger to state the whole fact in all its crudeness. He was on the point of trying to find out what had happened to Nora Karsten, when the newspapers had brought him the false report we know of. He had heard nothing about her, and nothing about the breaking off of her engagement with Curt.

He even ignored that she now appeared in her father's circus, and was therefore astounded at all that the newspapers reported. The placid creature was completely upset. One thing alone he would have staked his head upon—Nora was innocent of all that had taken place, and she had been forced into taking up this line of life by some mysterious and sad cause.

As to Nora's elopement, Dahnow graphically described it as a "d——d lie;" but he then, and at once, made up his mind to go to Vienna, and to ascertain how matters really stood. After a deal of trouble he succeeded not only in finding Nora's whereabouts, but also in getting at

the truth of the whole story, for the which our Mecklemburger silently triumphed and thanked God.

He now sat opposite to Nora whilst she gave him a clear insight into all the intricacies of her present position; and then he promised her that he would see about finding a clever lawyer, and would after that be able to give her sound and useful advice in the matter.

But Nora started at this proposal, and said in hesitating tones, "Oh, please let us avoid bringing a man of law into it! We shall be the talk of the whole town!"

Something in Dahnow's face told her that the matter had already been made public. Strange enough that it should be so! But we are all, more or less, like the ostrich, who fancies he is not seen, so long as he keeps his head under his wings. Children, too, are blest with the same illusion, and putting their little hands before their faces, call out triumphantly, "Now, where am I?"

A new light thus broke suddenly upon her, and she asked hastily and sharply: "Has the matter already been spoken of publicly?"

Dahnow tried to soothe her by reminding her of her father's and her own celebrity; and he hinted at the reports having been various and mostly false.

"What do you mean?" asked Nora, opening her large eyes. "Is it possible that my father was accused in any way? *He* was surely innocent of all that happened."

"It was only . . . you see . . . there was, in fact," stammered poor Dahnow, "a mistake made between the actors in this tragedy. The presence of the son here made it so difficult for any one to believe that . . . that . . . the mother would have gone away without him, so that it was perhaps natural. . . ."

"*A mistake!*" repeated Nora. "No! no! It's impossible!" she cried, turning crimson from shame and anger,

and hiding her face in her hands. "Oh, my God! Do you mean to say that I was supposed to"——

"You see," said Dahnow apologetically, "newspapers are always so inexact."

"Oh! This must be set to rights! This must be set to rights!" repeated Nora, wringing her hands in sheer despair.

"It has already been contradicted," said Dahnow. "I read only lately a denial of it in one of the leading papers here."

"It will hardly be of any use now," the poor girl sighed. "Whatever scandal is written about *us* is of course believed." And for the first time, since the day of the catastrophe, burning tears rolled down her cheeks.

"I will try all I possibly can for justice to be done to you," promised Dahnow. "I will move heaven and earth that your name may once more be above all suspicion."

And Dahnow kept his word. A few days later, and a clear and unanswerable refutation was in every paper; the paragraph laid particular stress upon the fact that Nora Karsten was, and had been all the time, at her father's bedside.

But Nora was right; the refutation produced no great effect. One read it as one reads such uninteresting paragraphs, hardly grasping, or caring even to grasp, at their real sense. It mattered little now whether it was the circus-director's wife or his daughter who had eloped. This dotting of the i's in such a matter was really superfluous.

The few people to whom the false report had been a turning-point in their lives, did not read the refutation. The family-circle at Göhlitz had but little taste now for the tittle-tattle of the public press; and through a tacit under-

standing the newspapers were generally laid aside and never discussed, for fear either of finding some allusion to the painful story, or else of being reminded of what they had rather try to forget. Moreover, the household was full of the joyful and busy agitation which precedes a wedding, and a wedding which had been so long hoped for and looked forward to.

Lily's face beamed with an intense happiness. The countess's dear wish had been accomplished at the moment when she had completely given it up. Curt's engagement to his cousin took place on the very day when he suddenly returned from his journey to town. All the evil tongues were forced into silence by the count; acquaintances forgot the reports which had hardly had time to get about; of course, friends smiled and shrugged their shoulders, and hemmed and hawed, as friends will do, but they all sent in their warm congratulations.

The chaplain was the only one who knew the truth and who might have cleared up the matter; but to have done so at such a moment would have been ill-advised, and he waited until a more favourable opportunity should offer itself.

Meanwhile, Dahnow was indefatigable in his efforts to settle the director's affairs. He was convinced that the best thing would be to give up the whole enterprise, to realise the great inventory, and to place Karsten's children under guardianship, as, at the best, the director would remain an invalid for life. He likewise advised the family transporting itself to the capital of North Germany, Karsten being naturalised there. Nora's face lighted up when Dahnow explained all this to her, for she had feared that it would be against her young brother's interests to give up the business.

"How long? how long?" had she once cried, hardly

thinking that the time would soon come when all would be clear and easy — so soon, and yet, as she owned to herself—too late!

But still she could not bear to leave the town in which she had seen him last, in which he had promised to visit her—the country in which he was born, and in which he lived.

She was seized by a great longing and a great restlessness. He had said he would come, and come he must. Had he not hastened to her once more, without her having sent for him? Why had he sought an explanation, if it was not that the old love in him had revived? Even in anger, his words had proved that he loved her still, and she thought of that moment in which he had once more pressed her to his arms, and had once more kissed her brow. Yes, yes, he would come! . . . . But no; it was better that he should keep away; she no longer wished him to return to her after all that had happened. . . . . If she could only just *see* him once more, tell him all, and then part from him for ever. . . . . She took her old letter out of its hiding-place, and laid it on her desk, ready to be given him when he came, so that he might realise how dreadful her position had been, how difficult for her to act otherwise than as she had acted.

The letter lay there a long time, but Curt never came, Nora's heart became heavy with presentiments. Had she, perhaps, pained him during their excited meeting, or had she explained herself badly? Perhaps the false reports about her had reached him . . . . but no; he would not rest his thoughts for one moment upon so infamous a calumny. Or, perhaps, he had fallen ill again, as had been the case after their meeting in the railway carriage! . . .

Her longing and anxiety grew greater; but although weeks passed by, during which she saw Dahnow daily—

although she was certain that he must know something about his friend, the question trembling upon her lips died before it had been spoken.

At last her anxiety won the day. It was twilight, and she felt sure that Dahnow could not see the agitation her features betrayed.

The honest Mecklemburger had come to give her a report about her father's affairs, and to reopen the subject of their change of residence. She could resist it no longer, and asked, in what she thought very indifferent tones, but in which her agitation was painfully perceptible,—

"By the way, Baron Dahnow, have you, perhaps, heard anything of Count Degenthal of late?"

Dahnow turned pale: he had so feared this question; for he had guessed from hearsay, as well as from her manner, that her attachment to Degenthal was not over, and that the news of his marriage would pain her deeply. He also blessed the twilight now, and answered, in a would-be indifferent voice: "Degenthal is quite well; I saw him some time ago, and found him quite recovered from his last illness; it is, moreover, to be hoped that a journey to the South, which he will undertake with his bride, will set him quite up again; his marriage with Countess Lily, that distant cousin of his, who was brought up by his mother, will take place in a few days."

The murder was out, but poor Dahnow felt cold sweat upon his brow, and looked fixedly at the carpet in order not to meet those eyes of hers, which he *could feel* were staring mournfully at him. Not a word passed her lips; she did not heave a sigh, or shed a tear, or utter an exclamation. It was a long and awful pause—one of those pauses during which it seems that we could even hear a pulse beat.

"I did not expect this!" she said suddenly, as if speak-

ing to herself. The heart has such simple words with which to express its deepest sorrows, but, in her simple words, there lay a whole life of disappointment. Then again, all was still—very quiet.

"I think I must go to my father," she said at last, rising. Her dark eyes flashed fire, and her face and her lips were deadly pale. She turned away, but her steps faltered, and she suddenly seized hold of the table.

Dahnow sprang up to support her.

"It is nothing," she said; "this long nursing has rather worn my nerves out." And raising her head with a proud firmness, she reminded one of her father in his nobler days.

Dahnow looked at her with a piteous sympathy in his honest eyes; she saw it, and was moved, and her mouth twitched like that of a child on the point of crying.

"Baron Dahnow," she said almost with a moan, "did the reports sound so *very* probable, then?"

"Everything was done in order to give them the appearance of truth," answered Dahnow gently.

"But you?" she asked impatiently. "How did you know that they were false?"

"I simply did not believe in them, because I knew you, Miss Nora," said the honest Mecklemburger bluntly, but in a trembling voice; but then he suddenly seized hold of his hat, and rushed out of the room.

Nora hardly noticed his departure.

"I simply did not believe in them, because I knew you," she went on repeating to herself. "And he! He believed in them at once!" she cried, covering her face with her hands whilst burning tears chased each other through her taper fingers.

Thoroughly ungrateful, as lovers are, for other mortals than for the loved one, she did not give a thought to him

who had placed such noble confidence in her; she only thought of him who had struck her the death-blow.

"He believed in all! Oh! would I had died before hearing this!"

Baron Dahnow wandered about a long time in the streets that evening, not noticing the cold, autumnal fog falling around him.

"She loves him still," he went on saying to himself, without any variation. "She loves him still—loves him *now*, and would love him, were he to leave her ten times in the lurch. Didn't I say that he would make her unhappy? But just upon *such* people do women go and waste their love, as if a man like that knew what love meant!"

Evidently Baron Dahnow thought *he* knew it; anyhow he knew it better than what hour of the night it was, or how long he had been out. At last, exhausted and shivering with cold, he entered his apartment; but, surrounded as he was by every sort of comfort, he did not feel at his ease. That pale, sad face was before him, and in his ears sounded the question: "But *you!* How did you know that they were false?"

Even in bed, his equanimity did not return. He had the bad habit—of course it is a bad habit—of reading in bed, getting sleepy, in short, over his books; but to-night even his favourite author seemed to offer him nothing worthy of interest. His pocket edition of Goethe, which went about everywhere with him, had its leaves mercilessly turned over, and he yet seemed to find nothing to suit his humour.

At last he stopped in the middle of Götz von Berlichingen, at a passage where Sickingen, speaking of his sweet Mary, says that girls crossed in love are ready for an offer of marriage. The words, which, in the original,

certainly savour more of practical wisdom than of ideal conception, seemed to strike him.

Had Dahnow been looking out for this passage? Now, that he had it, he threw the book away, as if he had read enough, more than enough, and blew out his candle. But he must have been visited by sweet visions in his dreams, for even in sleep his mouth was smiling still.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THIS last disenchantment was harder for Nora to bear than all the sorrows she had as yet gone through. There is a wide difference between giving up one's love for duty's sake, and being totally forgotten by that love, nay, even replaced by a new one. She had not expected this. It was a deeper humiliation to her than the contempt he had once treated her with. That very contempt was a remnant of his love, of a love which could not forgive because it could not forget. But now her last hope was gone. It was no longer the wild and violent sorrow of yore, it was that weariness of life which settles over the heart when it has nothing left to hope for. Youth's atmosphere is composed of love and of happiness, and if you rob it of both, you rob it of its breathing power.

But although one may be without hope, one need not be without feeling. Her old love had struck out newer and brighter flames after her meeting with Curt; and she loved him no longer with the dreamy love of early youth, but with the full force of a woman's heart. Such love is not quenched at once by a simple act of the will; it burns on, though smothered, and either transforms the soul into a diamond or else reduces it to ashes.

Nora spent all this time at her father's bedside, watching him as he lay there—one great ruin of his former self—incapable of movement, and expressing his few thoughts with great difficulty. It was no comfort to her that he did not require active nursing; a nature like hers would have preferred such movement to the forced calm she had to put on; it is so hard to be outwardly at rest when we can obtain no inward peace!

It was during one of these hours of forced outward tranquillity that she took up her pen and wrote the following words to her kind and pious friend—"How I envy you now your undisturbed peace, as I envy others their life's happiness! Why am I to taste neither of the one nor of the other? What have I done that my love should only have brought me sorrow? My sacrifice, too! It cost me all, and saved nothing and no one. Yes! I should now like to bury my heart away within your convent walls, and no longer have any feeling left for the joys or sorrows of the outer world."

The nun's answer ran thus: "Child, this is no cemetery; in order to give up all, the heart must be strong and full of life. At one time, it was you who would not remain; and now it is I who would not receive you, should you be willing to come. Poor, erring beings that we are. Groaning and mourning the loudest when God gives us the very life we had wished for.

"Did you not choose the struggle, and choose the love? Now, as then, I do not blame your choice. We all have a right to wish to taste of life—life in its joys and sorrows, and you had the right to struggle for that which seemed to you worth the having. But you knew that you would have to fight a hard combat, and that the result would be, at best, a doubtful one; you accepted love with all the woe attached to it; then why do you complain? Has

God been unjust, or sparing of His gifts? He gave you to live upon the agitated ocean of life—as you had wished it. He gave you love as you had longed for it. Have you already forgotten all those hours which seemed so overflowing with happiness? Even now, suffering as you suffer, tell me honestly, would you consent to efface that time from your life's history? Would you willingly extinguish all that you felt then?

"Child, you might have been lost in a far more dreadful shipwreck than the one you have gone through. Thank your Saviour for having left you your pure and taintless soul. If earthly love was sent you in order to preserve that purity, then may it be blessed. One day you will also know and understand the reason why it was sent you, the reason why you were called upon to sacrifice it. Consider the sacrifice as a cross sent by Providence in its wisdom—sent to *him* as well as to you. Why consume yourself in useless and bitter regret, after the many proofs he has given you of his love? Why not rather humbly accept that which God has sent you—that which He has fixed from all eternity, and against which man is powerless? But do not consider that your happiness is at an end; love is only one of the many ways of happiness God has given us. Arm yourself with a renewed will, and be ready for courageous action; you will see that it also brings its joys with it; and you know, dear, that before God, the earthly passion of our poor heart is but too secondary a thing for us to consider it the task of our life."

The grave and good nun! How wisely and how well she mixed the dose of natural and of supernatural comfort for the suffering girl!

Since the receipt of that letter, Nora had often repeated the question her friend had made her, "Would she consent

to efface that time from her life's history? Would she give up the happiness so as not to have the sorrow?" And each time her heart had cried "No," her lips also had whispered "No." For then all the blissful hours she had spent with him forced themselves upon her recollection, and she felt no longer to be pitied, nay, rather to be envied. And then again she thought of the words: "it was a cross which God sent *him* as well as *you*." That also took much of the sting from the wound, and reminded her that, after all, her conduct had been inexplicable to him; and from earth she raised her look to heaven—from earthly sorrow to heavenly comfort.

The winter passed by thus. Nora no longer disliked the thought of a change of residence, but the director's state of health still made it impossible. Dahnow had gone on before, in order to prepare everything for them, and to place the management of breaking up the troop in safe hands. This was no easy task, considering the impossibility of obtaining even an opinion from the director, and the minority of his son, as well as Nora's right to part of the fortune; Dahnow, however, overcame these difficulties with a rare talent and devotion. It is doubtful whether it was absolutely necessary for him to report the state of matters daily to Nora; but his letters gradually became a pleasant recreation for her in her monotonous life; especially as they were letters, which were to all appearance simple, business letters, but which in reality contained a great deal more. In the same manner as the most delicate and finest of our nerves are at our finger ends, so our tenderest feelings often assume form and colour at the end of our pen.

It was spring when at last the departure from Vienna took place. Dahnow had found a charming little house near the town, in which the director would enjoy good air

and perfect rest, two things which he absolutely required. The young man had made everything look as comfortable and as pretty as possible, and the scent of violets perfumed the rooms, as well as the small and neatly-kept garden which surrounded the house.

The April sun was shining upon the little party as if to welcome them to their new home, and as Dahnow received them at the door he was forcibly reminded of that April day upon which he had seen Nora for the first time. Yes, indeed! Her life had been as full of changes as the weather in April; her sun's happiness had glowed with an intense warmth upon her, and had been often overshadowed by clouds, until at last it had disappeared in a storm. And what could she expect from the last state of things?

Nevertheless, her eye brightened as she entered her new home—a home so completely her own, that she would for the first time be free from all that was attached to her father's career.

The winter had been to her as a long and sleepless night, after which the grey dawn of morning is welcome, although it may only be the harbinger of a rainy day. Nora breathed freely as she found herself once more living a new life, and able to devote herself to new energies.

Business matters had meanwhile been arranged, so that, notwithstanding the great losses of the last few years, enough remained for the director and his children to live comfortably.

Karsten hardly appeared to notice his change of quarters. He had so far recovered his physical strength as to be able to walk about, but his mind was still as if surrounded by a mist, and he could only understand in a dim sort of way what was happening around him.

Silent and still, he generally sat in his large arm-chair by the window, taking no part in what went on, or else he busied himself in his little garden, which he seemed thoroughly to enjoy.

Apparently he had no remembrance of the events which had lately taken place. Nora had feared that he would be upset by the news of the breaking up of his troop, but he received it with great indifference, and only observed, "Oh, that was Ellen's wish!" His mind was evidently busied with the time of his early manhood, and there were days when he only called Nora by her deceased mother's name.

As for his second wife, he never pronounced a syllable about her, or so much as named her; nor did he in the least notice the little boy. Once only the injured man's anger broke loose for a moment from the bonds which kept his mind a prisoner. The child had, naturally enough, been playing at riding in the Circus upon his wooden horse, and had pronounced Landolfo's name in doing so. At the same moment the director's features were contracted by a fearful fit of anger, and throwing himself upon the child, he would have felled him to the ground had not Nora rushed to the rescue. He then stamped upon the harmless plaything, and continued in this wild state during hours and hours.

For the first time Nora, kneeling by him, and taking fearlessly his closed fists in her hands, spoke to him, with trembling lips, but in a calm and firm voice, words of pious warning, and whispered prayers into his ears, until the rolling eyes closed themselves in sleep.

The task, the great task she had once set herself, had been lost sight of in the midst of her happiness and of her sorrow; she now remembered with a pang how, in her girlish days, she had felt that it must be her first duty to

awake her father's soul from the indifference his career had brought with it, and how, later on, she had only lived, thought, and prayed for her love. The task appeared before her now in all its grave and important light, and she knew that she had lost her time, and had neglected the greatest of her duties. Happy Nora! for she had now found something more absorbing to herself than her own sorrow, and at the same time she had found the best remedy for it.

Moreover, things now smiled upon her from another and a less grave point of view. It was impossible not to take some pleasure in life with so good and so pleasant a friend as Baron Dahnow at her side, whose whole thoughts and whole endeavours were directed towards the one aim, of making her happy. For instance, it was perhaps a detail, and yet it contributed much to her comfort to find a horse in readiness for her. She thought it at once too costly and too useless a pleasure, and would have done away with it had not Dahnow insisted, upon the strength of his having the direction of affairs, that the horse was to be kept. It was necessary for her health, and he met every objection she made with a practical answer. There was no doubt but that, when the weariness, which steals over one after every great sorrow, was beginning to take possession of her, it did her endless good to ride out into the fresh air, and enjoy the sight of nature's beauties.

She generally started off early in the morning in order to meet no one, and she always chose the most solitary rides. It sometimes happened, nevertheless, that she came across a solitary rider, who seemed also not to care for his morning's repose, and whom she permitted to ride beside her, which was the only reward Dahnow earned for having arranged everything so well. Those were friendly, cosy rides along the quiet roads, among the fresh and green

trees, displaying all their springlike magnificence. Those were the hours in which Nora's eyes had something of their old sparkle about them, and in which her cheeks would bear a healthy colour.

Was it extraordinary that Dahnow, riding in her company, and gazing with her at the fresh life budding out on all sides, should also have felt a new and great hope arise in his heart? Was it so easy to nature, and should it be impossible to the human heart, to shoot out fresh blossoms of love?

Whatever he thought, whatever he felt, not a word fell from his lips which might have troubled Nora at that time; nor did he even allude to the past.

Baron Dahnow had the rare gift of never being in any one's way. Nora felt this particularly in her present intercourse with him. As at one time his letters, now his visits, were the only events which gave her pleasure in her monotonous life.

Her feelings were still too much benumbed for her to be able to notice, to their full extent, the constancy and delicacy of the attentions he surrounded her with; but she was very thankful to him, and she enjoyed his society. There were certainly some topics which she would willingly have discussed just then, but to which he was a stranger; and yet she could not deny that it was very pleasant to see so constantly a true friend, and a clever man.

Baron Dahnow could speak well and fluently; he moreover had visited her mother's country across the seas, and having studied its manners and customs thoroughly, he could talk about it in an interesting manner. It was, perhaps, a slight circumstance, but it awoke a new string of ideas in her to hear so much about America.

Although, however, it had now become quite a natural and settled thing that Dahnow should ride out with Nora

in the morning, and should spend his afternoons at the villa, and although she always received him as a welcome visitor, spring went by and summer came, and even autumn began to show its golden and russet leaves, before Dahnow had mustered courage to say what lay at his heart. Perhaps Nora's eyes met his too openly; perhaps her hand was held out in too friendly and easy a manner when he entered the room.

He had established himself completely in the capital, and when questioned as to his strange taste for a dusty town in summer, he answered that he wished to continue his scientific studies, and added, moreover, that the sun of the tropics had made him proof against any amount of heat. Science had evidently gained a wonderfully zealous disciple in him.

Could it be true that Nora was still so busied with herself that she had noticed nothing of what was going on in Dahnow's feelings? Suffice it to say, that she was exceedingly alarmed when at last he summoned courage to say the word—to offer her all that a man can offer the woman he loves.

And, indeed, he was a man who might well have touched a good woman's heart, standing, as he now stood before her, so manly, so earnest, so deeply moved by a noble emotion, telling her, as he then told her, all that he had felt for her and had concealed in his heart of hearts since the first day he had seen her in the villa at Bonn.

But it was only terror which could be read in her eyes, and without even allowing him to conclude, she brought out all the objections she could think of. Her reputation which had suffered so much before the world—at this Dahnow smiled; the difference of religion which must necessarily divide them—Dahnow tried to make it all easy by promises which she knew he would keep, but

Nora only shook her head; her father who required her so much, her little step-brother whom she could not leave; and then she spoke of his friendship which was so dear to her, and which could only be troubled by trying to change it into anything else. She told him how beautiful his life might be, how his dear science would fill it up pleasantly, and of all the chances which awaited him. One is so eloquent when one wishes to say No!

Dahnow listened to her quietly, and he saw how anxiously she looked at him, fearing she would now lose her last friend, and he saw, alas! that there was not a spark in those eyes of what he had hoped, with time and patience, to awaken in them. Had he, perhaps, spoken too soon? Had he not left the wound time enough to heal? Dahnow was a patient man, and he could wait during years if it was necessary; perhaps she must accustom herself by degrees to a new love. "Let it all be as if I had said nothing," were the only words he spoke, and Nora's hand was placed so joyfully and so confidingly in his that he told himself, with a bitter sigh, it would, indeed, be easy for her to forget what he had said, and she would be happy if he allowed her to do so.

Dahnow came as before, and took his accustomed place in the family circle. He amused the director during the winter evenings, either by playing at dominoes with him or by awaking gradually a few remembrances of the past; he also played with the boy, tossing him about on his knees, and he told him funny stories, which always became more full of animation and of drollery when he heard Nora joining in the laughter. To her he brought books and works of art of every kind, and, indeed, she enjoyed to the utmost extent such pleasures of the intellect. Often when the heart is no longer the supreme master of our

being, the mind steps in to its place, and begins a reign undisturbed. It is only on a dry and ungrateful ground that no new plant can grow, but the richer the nature the more easily it receives new impressions, and if the charm of the young girl, with her freshness and simplicity, be indeed great, the charm of the intelligent woman, who is able to follow and to enter into a man's powerful ideas, is greater still. Dahnow felt this, and felt it with a bitter pang. She had never appeared so beautiful to him as now—now that her sorrow was somewhat less sternly depicted upon her features, and that there lay upon them the calm and rest which follow upon great storms of feeling nobly borne. He felt it, too, seeing her as he saw her daily occupied with nursing her father, or watching over her little brother, or else directing her household. There was a calm, an intelligence, and a complete unselfishness in all she did, which worked in a peculiarly attractive manner upon poor Dahnow.

But there came a day when he felt that he could bear it no longer. He suddenly arose, and saying in an almost unearthly voice, "I cannot come again," moved away without further explanation.

Nora sprang up, anxious not to let her friend leave, anxious to call him back at any cost, but then she remained standing, as if rooted to the ground, pressing her hand to her heart, and she let him go. She had not the right to keep him back, if she could not give him anything in return for all he had given her; and truly she had next to nothing to give him, if she refused him the only thing he asked for. Yet she heaved a deep sigh at the thought of how dreadfully she would miss him—the only friend she had in the world.

Dahnow was gone; perhaps he had had a faint hope that Nora would recall him, and that he would be able to

overcome her resistance. Anyhow, his friends noticed that if the sun of the tropics had made it easy for him to bear the scorching heat of summer, it had changed his temperament so far that he could no longer bear a winter in the North. He had grown almost thin, and was so changed, that one advised him seriously to try what a warmer climate would do for him. Dahnow followed this advice, and, packing up, he started before the odious winds of spring, as he termed them, would begin.

His brothers thought that it would have been better for him to settle down sensibly, and to take a wife who would make him forget all this nonsense about difference of climate; but a sister of his, who was blessed with a very numerous family, and considered him therefore more in the light of a promising uncle, opined that it was not necessary for every one to marry, and that it was quite clear Clemens had no taste for that sort of thing. Why shouldn't he be allowed to live as he liked, provided he did not once more take it into his head to cross the seas? Dahnow did not cross the seas, for even unrequited love acts as a magnet upon us, so that we do not like to place too great a distance between ourselves and the loved one.

In the Karsten home, everything was dreadfully still and quiet after his departure. He had been such a good and kind friend, and had brought so much life into their little circle.

It was now Nora's turn to forget herself more than ever, in order to make up to her father and her brother for what they had lost, and she acquired much of cheerfulness in forcing herself to be cheerful for others. At first, it gave her some trouble to speak gladly and merrily, and she would think and ponder a long time before anything joyous came to her lips; but at last her forced cheerfulness worked

its effect upon herself, and when she made others smile she unconsciously smiled too.

And thus the days rolled by quietly and uniformly, and when the summer was past again and autumn was beginning to appear, Nora saw that her father's physical strength was gradually giving way, and, strangely enough, his mental powers returning to him, gradually also. He understood things better, he could remember, too, and he seemed to have once more the capacity to feel and to think. Nora's influence worked more powerfully upon him, and his thoughts now turned towards higher and better things.

One day he expressed the wish to see a priest, and as Nora, her heart overflowing with joy, pressed a kiss upon his forehead, he laid his hand, smiling, upon her shoulder, and, looking lovingly into her eyes, he said, "You women always get the best of it in the end; you will turn me yet into a pious man, your mother first, and then you, my child. . . . Yes, had I followed Ellen's advice in temporal as well as in spiritual matters, I should have been another man. Child, it is true that we can form our destiny, but we succumb to the influences we have placed ourselves under. For you, my child, the consequences were the hardest to bear. No," he continued, as Nora laid her hand upon his mouth in order to stop him, "let me speak. It has been gnawing at my heart ever since, but I could not put it into words. I destroyed the happiness of your life; it would all have happened differently had I not been so selfish. But, tell me, did I dream it, or is it true, that he returned to you after all?"

"Yes, yes, he came to me," whispered Nora; and as she said so, a feeling of happiness shot through her heart, as if his visit had only been crowned with joy.

"Why did he not remain?" asked the old man frowning.

"A misunderstanding," said Nora gently. "Father, dear, it couldn't have happened anyhow. . . . It's better thus."

The old man looked at his child, and seeing how noble, how beautiful, how pure she was, he asked himself whether she was not worthy of occupying any place.

"And what prevents the misunderstanding being explained? You are, both of you, in the full force of youth, and it's never too late for happiness. What happened to him? Where is he?" he said with animation.

"He married long ago, father," whispered Nora—nor could she help a burning blush from suffusing her cheeks. "I tell you, father, it couldn't have been otherwise," she added, as if to spare her quondam lover the very shadow of a reproach.

Her father looked at her sadly.

"My poor child!" he said, and drew her tenderly towards him; she hid her head upon his shoulder. But suddenly he pushed her gently away. "And the other, where is he? You know, Nora, the fat one who used to come so often last winter? I was not able to think at that time—my head hurt me so—but I remember that he came almost daily, and although he was very friendly to me, I cannot, of course, imagine that he only came to see a poor old fool like I have grown. Why does he come no longer? Did you send him away, Nora?"

"Let me remain with you, papa," answered Nora. "My only comfort now is to be with you."

The old man shook his head, and looked displeased.

"I shall probably not remain long with you," he said. "He was a good man, Nora, with an honest and a true heart. It would be such a comfort to me not to leave you alone."

"Let it all happen as God wills!" said Nora; "there were difficulties in the way of this too."

"Yes, you are, and you remain, the circus-rider's daughter, who can take root nowhere, who is fitted for no place," he observed bitterly.

"Forgive me," she said, "there is a place in which one is not asked what one has been, nor what one is, but only what one will do to reach the highest aim of all. Perhaps the Almighty intends me for that place, although I am not perfectly sure of it myself yet."

"I don't quite understand," he answered somewhat peevishly, "but do as you think best, my advice has already done you enough harm. But, listen, before I have gone quite down the hill, I should like you to send for the chaplain. You know the one I mean—the one who stood by my poor wife's death-bed; he will also make it easier for me to die! The last time I saw him I was rude to him; he came to me as if he wished to warn me, and to remind me of her wishes about you; and that I would not put up with. Yes, I was in a bad frame of mind then, but I think he will forgive me. I must also speak with him about the boy, so that he may tell me what is to be done in order to prevent his falling into those people's clutches. No! but he shan't fall into their clutches," he added, gnashing his teeth. "However, I wish also to part in peace with them; and when I am dead, Nora, you may write to the boy's mother that I have forgiven her. She was the less to blame in the matter, and Ellen was right; when we once allow light custom to grow up in us, we are safe against no temptation. That you didn't become like the other, was no merit of mine."

The aged man paused a few minutes, and then continued: "I forgive him also his ignoble conduct, for, after all, he saved me once from perdition, and his last odious

act saved me from a perdition still more terrible than the mere temporal one. Nora, had it not happened thus, we should have been parted; and what would have become of me, my darling, without you to watch at my side! You were right in saying that it is well it should have happened thus. Had you gone away with him, with the one who would have placed you in a completely different circle, I should have become a total stranger to you; but now there is nothing to divide us. You have become my comfort, my support, my salvation in a better sense than the one I had dreamt of. . . . . Child! your mother left you to me."

"Yes, it is well that it should be so," said Nora gently and calmly, although her heart beat rebelliously at the remembrance; but she rubbed her cheek fondly against her father's, and holding her arm around his neck, she felt wondrously calm, wondrously happy. She understood now the reason why she had been forced to make that great sacrifice, and she saw, blessing God the while, that it had borne such glorious fruit.

And thus in a beautiful intimacy did father and daughter spend the remaining time they enjoyed together on earth.

It seemed to be once more with Karsten as it had been in the days when Ellen's influence was creeping softly over him, and trying in its pious love to gain his soul for heaven. He now longed for spiritual consolations, and Nora could give them as sweetly and as fully as her mother would have done.

It was also a beautiful hour that in which the restless adventurer, the man of pleasure, lay quietly in his child's arms, and there sank into his last repose—in the arms of that child who had so completely given herself up to him by the sacrifice of her life's happiness. His last days were

full of holy peace and of warm love, for, after all the strange windings of his life, his better self had been rescued.

The chaplain came as soon as he received Nora's letter, and proved himself, as usual, a true and sympathetic friend. Alfred Karsten's last words to him were, as Ellen's also had been, begging him to watch over his daughter, who remained once more alone without protection.

Consequently, a few days after all was over, the chaplain asked Nora what her future intentions were. She had just received a letter which she had read with the greatest attention, and as she now looked up at the chaplain, there was a tear trembling on her eyelashes.

"This letter would settle the question very easily," she said, "you cannot imagine how much noble love and honest feeling it contains."

"Does it come from Baron Dahnow?" asked the chaplain in a somewhat uneasy tone.

"Yes," she said quietly, "from Baron Dahnow, who, having heard of my father's last illness, offers me, in case of the sad event which has just taken place, to protect and to love me, and to endow me with his name, without giving a thought to all the past."

"It is certainly a very noble offer, and quite in accordance with his character," said the chaplain, "if only"—and he paused, as if discussing the point with himself. What should he advise Nora to do in her position? A marriage with such an excellent man certainly assured her a happy future.

"No," she said decidedly; "there are no ifs about it. But such a proposal should make it clear to me what I wish to do. All that for which I once longed has no more any charm for me. The tree when felled to the ground by the storm begets no new leaves; but when the roots remain, it need not rot, but may, on the contrary,

shoot forth many a new branch." She spoke reflectively, in a whisper, as if to herself.

"I don't quite understand what you mean," said the chaplain. "I know of some hearts who are satisfied with giving love, without expecting it to be returned to the full; and I think that makes a woman happier than to mourn for a past love. . . . . There is, however, one difficulty" ——

"I thank God that that difficulty exists," she interrupted. "Had it not existed, standing between us as a stern duty, I could not have done otherwise than recompense such faith and such devotion by my whole life. But, as it is, the deepest love would not suffice to fill up the chasm!"

"And yet," said the chaplain, feeling that it was his duty not to encourage her, though sorry that it should be so, "it would have been a great comfort to see you arrive at last at the port."

She raised her beautiful head, and looked dreamily before her. "Yes, such a marriage would indeed prove a quiet haven of rest; but do you think it would be for my happiness? I am my father's daughter through and through; I must have active work; I must fight out the combat of life. I wished to do it once for earthly happiness, let me do it now for a higher purpose."

"Oh, my child! be careful of taking such a decision in a moment of exaltation," said the chaplain in an anxious tone. "When we have gone through a severe disenchantment, we so often think it easy to have done for ever with all that life offers us of good and of beautiful."

"But I don't wish to do without it," she said with something like a smile on her lips. "On the contrary, I want to begin life again in right good earnest. The time is past during which I would fain have buried myself away in

quiet and repose. I will rest no longer; I have set myself new and great tasks. Believe me, the Lord has left me courage and strength for accomplishing many a work before I die."

She now arose and stood before him, and as he saw her in the full strength and beauty of her womanhood, her eyes sparkling with a warm enthusiasm, he could not but admit that she seemed in no way tired of life.

"And what will happen to him?" said the chaplain, glancing at the boy who was playing at some distance from them.

"Yes, my first duty is towards him, and I will try to fulfil it thus. I will seek to create for him a new home amongst my mother's relations across the ocean. There he will have protection and love, and his career can be more easily marked out for him there. For me also a wider field of action will open itself in the new world. Since Baron Dahnow's description, I feel powerfully attracted towards America, where so many hands are wanting to work for our dear Lord. But you, my kind and good friend, the first friend of my childhood, please help me in my preparations for this great journey; help me now, as you did once before, to take my first step upon a new road."

The chaplain held out his hand to her. "You have set yourself many a task, and for the third time you have chosen combat instead of peace. The Lord leads you truly along strange ways! Your mother had only one idea, your salvation, and I think that her prayer has been heard, for you seem also to have no other aim. God be with you, my child!" And then he alluded for the first time to a subject they had not yet touched upon. "Your happiness was cruelly marred," he said.

"It was only one sort of happiness," she answered

mildly, "and there are other and better things besides a May-love;" and thus ended their conversation.

A few months later, a young couple, coming from Italy, arrived at a South German town situated in the midst of the mountains. The young wife concentrated all her attention upon a boy who, only a few months old, had been born beneath a warm blue sky, and for whom it was considered necessary to spend some time in Southern Germany, in order that the cold north German winds should not nip off the son and heir in the bud.

The gentleman looked, on the whole, rather bored at his wife dedicating her sole attention to the child, and, indeed, she seemed as if she could not think of anything else. Of course, he was a very proud and happy father; but for all that, he seized hold of the first opportunity for leaving her to the charms of the baby. The mountains appeared bathed in a pink dew, and the summer evening was so inviting that he strode out gladly upon a large terrace facing the hotel. He soon noticed another individual seated at some distance, and turning his back upon him. It struck him that the figure and the whole attitude had something familiar about them, so that he advanced a few steps, and then again stopped, hesitating. At last he exclaimed, "Is it you?" and, then, stepping forward, he continued—"Yes, it is Dahnow; you could travel incognito now, you've such a wonderful figure. How delighted I am to see you, old fellow!"

"Ah! Degenthal!" answered the other coldly, and turning his face slowly towards him.

"Yes, I; on my way home after three years' absence, bringing my wife and child with me, too," he added, laying a stress upon the last words. "A famous boy it is!

But what's the matter with you? How strange you look," he added, hurt at Dahnow's expression.

"I probably look like some one who has just been refused for the third time," said Dahnow bitterly, and putting a letter he had been holding in his hand into his pocket.

"*You* refused! you, such a capital good fellow, so rich, and run after; why, that is impossible! Who on earth can have refused *you?*"

"Nora Karsten," said Dahnow, hurling the name at him with a burst of indignation.

And, indeed, it was unlucky that these two men should have met at that moment, the one happy and satisfied, and the other refused for his sake.

"Nora," he repeated; "the man to whom the pearl belonged left it lying in the dust, and no other hand is allowed to pick it up!"

"Nora Karsten," stammered Degenthal, stepping back, "Nora Karsten, who eloped with that man Landolfo?" . .

"Oh! it was easy to believe for him who chose to do so!" said Dahnow, turning his back upon him. But Degenthal seized a convulsive hold of his shoulder: "What was easy to believe? What do you mean? What was untrue?"

"I mean that it was the most abominable and barefaced lie in the world. To think only that that girl should have run away with that blackguard! That that noble creature should have married that cur! Whoever could have believed such a thing must have wished to believe it! If you care for the details, let me tell you that it was her *step-mother* who ran away with that gentleman, leaving husband and child in the lurch, as is the way with ladies of that kind. In order to make matters pleasanter for themselves, and to vent their hatred against Nora, the precious couple spread the news under the poor girl's name, and it

was evidently crowned—thanks to general credulity—by an uncommon success."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Degenthal, "impossible! With my own eyes"——

"You probably read what *I* read," said Dahnow sarcastically; "and I—I who had never the bliss of approaching her as you had—I who had not tried to take possession of her heart—I who did not make her fine speeches about her being worth all the world to me, about saving and protecting her—I did *not* believe it! I esteemed her sufficiently to see at once through such an abominable lie, and gave myself a little trouble in order to get at the truth. One single question was sufficient to make everything clear. . . . As for you," and Dahnow grew more and more eloquent in his rising anger, "what have you done? Did not I warn you at that time, when, in a manner devoid of all sense, you did all you could to win her? Did not I tell you beforehand that the intoxication of love would cool down before stern and sad reality? That was the moment in which, weighing the matter with your conscience as a man, you should have retired. But he who dares to take such a step after mature consideration—and you were right, for I swear that she was worthy of it—and who then seeks empty reasons for freeing himself, he is . . . There! It makes me sick to think of it! Do you know how I found her? She was sitting at her unconscious father's bed-side, her apparently dying father, alone with the abandoned child. Her reputation blasted on your account, her situation hopeless, and no one there to help her, no one to pour out for her one drop of comfort! I tried to help her as far as it lay in my power, and I did all that a man can do for the woman he prizes the most in the world; but I could not gain one thought for myself, one thought which would have made her faithless to you! I have seen how her love

for *you,* forsooth! robbed her of every joy, of every happiness. Strong and courageous as she was in everything else, she still mourned for her past love. And, let me tell it you, to your face, I despise with all my heart the man who could thus destroy a woman's happiness, who could thus mar her whole life!" And shaking off Degenthal's hand from his shoulder in no gentle manner, he strode into the hotel.

Degenthal remained alone. He had not interrupted Dahnow, no, not even by a word or an exclamation, but he felt an icy coldness creeping about his heart, as once of yore; and he pressed his hand upon it, as if seized by a sudden bodily pain. During three years he had lived in comparative repose and happiness, three years during which he had tried to put away every thought of Nora, and to suppress every doubt which, *nolens volens,* would sometimes arise in him. When he had found it more difficult than usual to put away old memories, he had worked himself into a proper state of anger and of indignation, and told himself that he had had a lucky escape, and now!——

His wife's voice sounded at this moment upon the terrace, calling him somewhat impatiently, "Curt, Curt; I beseech of you, what can make you stand such a long time staring at those old mountains, instead of looking at our darling who is so lovely just now? Only think, he notices that he is in a strange place, and refuses to sleep unless we change the arrangement of the room. Isn't it clever of him? Come in, you must help us;" and thus speaking, the wife took a somewhat despotic hold of her husband's arm and drew him in.

Curt followed as in a dream—as in a dream also, he allowed the boy to be placed into his arms, admired his beauty and praised his cleverness, as much as could be

desired by the wife and the nurse. It certainly was as dear a little child as possible at ten months old. Curt shoved about the bed, until at length, no easy task, the wife's, the nurse's, and the baby's contradictory wishes had been fulfilled. But there was something so absent and so strange in his whole manner, that Lily noticed it at last.

"Send naughty papa away, my darling; he hardly looks at you a bit, and will only be happy when he is out again with his cigar and his mountains. You men are so heartless," she added pouting.

Curt's only protest against this accusation was to deposit a kiss upon his boy's red lips, and then he was glad to go, for he felt as if he could hardly breathe in that room. At a moment—such as the one he was now going through —in which an old passion flames up afresh in us, even our first child's smile does not suffice to calm us. The fresh and pure mountain air, and the quiet peace of a summer evening, did not seem to do him good either. From time to time a sentence, sounding more like a cry of anguish than a string of words, broke from his lips: "It was easy for him to believe it, who chose to do so." Was it really true, and had he wished to believe it?

The moon was standing high above the mountain tops, and Curt remained in the same place, until at last he felt a hand laid upon his shoulder. It was Dahnow who stood before him, and it was not only the moonlight which made those two men look as pale as two ghosts.

"Degenthal," he said gravely, "I have come to say good-bye, and, before we part, let me be assured that all anger my words may have called forth is at an end. It was wrong of me to disturb your happiness and your peace; but there are hours in which a devil awakes in us. No, we will say no more about it. No amount of words could do any good; it was evidently intended that things should

happen thus, and you did not wish to act dishonestly. She was not meant for either of us, perhaps she is right also not to wish to marry a man of another faith; and yet I am sure I would not have opposed her in anything. She has, however, lived enough in difficult and crooked circumstances—perhaps it is better so!"

"Where is she?" asked Degenthal, and the words had only a sound about them.

"Karsten is dead, and she is going to her mother's home," said Dahnow shortly. "But now, let all that be buried; I would not part from you in anger, and I am off to-night. Farewell, Curt, may you be happy in the blessings God has conferred upon you!"

"Where do you go?" asked Degenthal, grasping Dahnow's extended hand.

"Where?" repeated Dahnow. "Why, you see, to the man who can create himself no homely hearth, the whole world is open—but at the end the bird returns willingly to its first roosting-place, and the time may come when my northern home will appear the best place for me to roost in."

"What will become of you?" asked Degenthal, misunderstanding the sense of his words, for he heard them only as in a dream.

"What will become of me?" said Dahnow, starting at the strange question. "Probably a great puzzle to all those who may still wish to turn me to use, and later on a pleasant look out for my nephews."

With this little joke—for he could not resist a joke even then—Clemens Dahnow turned away. It was only a joke, yet it was a graphic description of Dahnow's future life.

After travelling about during a few years, he returned home, and settling down in the capital, he continued,

surrounded by his family, to pursue his scientific studies, in which he soon made himself conspicuous.

His house was, as ever, a model of refined comfort and taste, and he gladly surrounded himself by pleasant and merry people. He was right; it soon became a difficult problem for the world to solve how a man gifted with so warm a heart, and so fond of his home, should not wish to take unto himself a wife: but he steadily refused to follow his friends' advice, and was as a tower of fortitude against every daring plan made by his family to succeed in marrying him.

The pleasant prospect for his nephews became every year pleasanter, but all of a sudden it was threatened by the appearance of an American, an agreeable and pleasing young man, bearing an old French name, and whom Dahnow took completely under his protection. He wished to travel in Germany, but for the present he seemed to look upon the baron's house perfectly as his own, and spent weeks, nay months, as his guest. He was so declared a favourite of the master of the house, that a dread surprise took hold of certain relations, who assembled in family council, and asked each other—"What could be the meaning of this?" However, a general calm succeeded on learning that the young American was a rich proprietor in the new world, and that there need be no fear of his placing himself on the list with Dahnow's heirs.

Relieved from their fears, Dahnow's relations now gave themselves up to the great pleasure of trying to guess in what relationship this young man stood towards him.

The latter was silent and smiled. As for the young man, he put himself completely at his ease, turned the quiet house topsy-turvy, showed but small interest for his protector's scientific researches; but, on the other hand, enjoyed his horses and his dogs, without being in the

least able to explain to himself why he should stand so high in his host's favour. Perhaps the secret lay in the letter of introduction he had brought the baron, or in the name of her whom he mentioned so often, and who, having watched over his childhood as a mother would have done, had at last left him the greater part of her fortune; or, perhaps, there was something in the finely-chiselled profile which reminded Baron Dahnow of the only features he had ever loved, and which had had the power to trouble his quiet destiny.

CHAPTER XXV.

YEARS had gone by — years which contained whole lives, for is not a whole life contained from the dawn of each hope in youth to its extinction in maturer age? Whatever comes before is a mere dream, whatever comes after a mere remembrance. For some it is spun out into many long years, for others it is over in a very short time; but one's actual *life* lies within the boundaries of one's hopes.

We are once more in the Göhlitzer garden, with its sunny terrace, and its flowery beds shining forth in all the glory of the month of August. But it is not only the flowers upon which the sun shines; an animated party is also enjoying its rays. Young figures are moving about, merry groups of children are dancing on the lawn, and men and women, in the full force of youth, are amusing themselves, laughing and chattering to the sound of the band which is concealed behind the bushes. It is a day of family rejoicing at Göhlitz, the birthday of the master of the house, of the old master, as Curt Degenthal is now called, since his eldest boy's marriage—his eldest boy who is already a *paterfamilias* himself!

The numerous party assembled is the best proof of the

manner in which the family has extended itself into many ramifications.

Curt and Lily had remained true to Göhlitz. As soon as they had returned from the south, they settled down there definitively. This arrangement suited all parties. Curt was thus able to leave his mother the direction of a property which had been governed by her during so many years, and Lily also preferred wielding the sceptre in her own domain. When Countess Degenthal became too aged to continue her administrative functions, she was replaced by Curt's eldest son who had attained his majority, Lily being quite satisfied to see her offspring thus at the head of a large estate. By such an arrangement there was no difficulty in the father making over his powers to the son, and the parents remained on at Göhlitz, which had grown dear to them from the force of long habit.

As for the aged countess, she might well say that all her wishes had been accomplished; her son was united to the rich heiress she had desired for him ever since his earliest childhood. The marriage had been a happy one, for Curt surrounded his wife with constant attentions and sincere affection, and their family had been both numerous and healthy. Lily's fortune had enabled her to endow the name of Degenthal with a brilliancy it had hardly ever possessed before, and the countess had the satisfaction of seeing her grandchildren marry into the greatest families of the land. And yet there was a thorn hidden under these roses, a thorn which pricked her all the more severely that she could not complain of it.

The countess had lost her son, the darling of her heart, lost him in the real sense of the word, for Lily allowed no division of her property. She was not of a grand nature, and grand natures alone, soaring above petty envy and love of possession, can share with another spiritual as well as

material goods. The horizon of her heart was as narrow as that of her mind. Her husband and her children durst only belong to herself; she suffered no other influence over them, she permitted no other hearts to bask in the sunshine of their love; not even to the holiest of all loves—that of a mother—did she yield its rights. She was always respectful, and never made herself guilty of any positive undutifulness, but those two dominating minds could not in any way sympathise together. She knew that the mother had once exercised a great influence over the son; and, now, doing all in her power, and displaying a great art in feminine tactics, she succeeded in estranging the one from the other. Curt was too indifferent to things in general, and there were too many memories which a continued silence had poisoned with bitterness between him and his mother, for him to struggle against his wife's endeavours, and thus the countess, in her old age, led a lonely life, and was lonely also in her heart.

Perhaps, during the long and solitary hours of her life's evening, there appeared before her a vision of that girl with the warm and loving eyes, whose voice had sounded so softly when entreating her to bestow a mother's heart upon her; and perhaps she remembered how the nun had once told her "she might lose a son instead of gaining a daughter." She had had proofs of the heroism with which Nora had behaved, and she had not been able to refuse Karsten's daughter the admiration she deserved. And now, lonely as the countess was, her mother's heart appreciated to the full the sacrifice a child had made to her parent. Did the thought arise in her that a more balmy breeze would have cheered her old age, had she now found herself in contact with this large and warm heart? Did she picture to herself at times what her son might have become in the companionship of so elastic and intelligent

a mind? Certainly something far different from the quiet and almost indolent being he had now grown into, taking refuge from the narrow circle of his wife's thoughts in solitary studies, but never dreaming of stepping into public life, and of becoming a man such as his aspiring youth would have led one to expect, such as would have been his mother's pride. The countess might well heave a sigh if thoughts like these crossed her brain, but her sighs were of regret not of contrition. She had acted according to her idea of duty, and was, to the very last, convinced that whatever she had striven after was the best and the most sensible aim.

Lily had changed very little since the years of her girlhood, and the small and rather robust wife and mother was disturbed by no other thought or wish than what immediately concerned the circle of her family, and there everything had been peaceful and happy. The ray of inner life and animation which had entered her heart, together with her love for Curt, had been extinguished as soon as her desire had been satisfied. With it, too, had disappeared the charm which had for a short time endowed her whole being. Curt belonged to her irrevocably, and not caring for that inner life—the only life to some reflective natures—she devoted all her energies to the external and active life in which she busied herself, and in which with time her business grew into fussiness.

To-day she stepped along, looking as proud and as happy as ever, by the side of her eldest son, whose fresh and rosy face resembled his mother's. She was all eyes and ears for him, and listened attentively to all his ideas and plans for improvements, showing by the manner in which she always put his opinion foremost, that she respected in him the future master. Even in this particular she had exhibited that obstinacy of feeling which was so peculiar

to her, for none of her other children had been able to dispute in her mother's heart the first and chosen place of her eldest son.

It is often the case that children inherit their father's physical form, and are imbued with their mother's character; and thus Curt's and Lily's children had all graceful figures, and were endowed with their mother's simple and practical mind. They all went quietly along the beaten road, all with the exception of one, the second son, who, with his father's dark eyes and his thoughtful brow, had also inherited his more grave and delicate turn of mind. He strove to attain the heights for which one longs when "Excelsior!" is engraved in the heart. But he was not a mere dreamer, and a drop of his mother's blood probably made him put his elevated ideas into practice. Before he had attained his eighteenth year he had determined to dedicate himself entirely to God's service, and entering a religious order, he was soon sent forth as a missionary.

Degenthal grieved to see him depart, but he was most anxious in his desire not to cross the wishes of his children in their choice of a career, and steadily opposed his wife when he saw her on the point of making or marring the future of a child according to her own will.

Lily was soon comforted in the thought that she could now make over to her eldest son the property which she had intended for the second. Father Degenthal's vocation had taken him across the ocean to the other hemisphere, and he had been many a year away from home; but his loving heart clung to the ties of his childhood, and he never forgot, even from afar, to take his part in each family rejoicing.

A letter from him had just arrived, and the old count left the noisy circle of his children and grandchildren to enjoy the news from his absent and dearly-

loved son, which had reached him so opportunely on his birthday. Curt then sat in his room; it was furnished with books and maps, clearly indicating its proprietor's tastes. Being next to the drawing-room, it also opened on to the terrace, and the deep bow-window, surrounded by Virginian creepers, was a pleasant little nook, from which the noise going on in the garden could only be faintly heard.

Curt was obliged to seek the best light for his tired eyes, and certainly the thickness of the packet seemed to justify his precaution. But, on opening the envelope, he was surprised to find a second letter enclosed in it, bearing no address.

There was no denying it, as he now sat with the sun playing upon the silver threads of his hair, so soft and so plentiful, he was a handsome old man as he had once been a handsome youth. In his earlier years, an expression of strength had perhaps been wanting, but now that age had given him a grave dignity, rather increased than otherwise by his long white beard, his was decidedly a striking face.

During years and years after his meeting with Dahnow, a total indifference seemed to have taken possession of his being. People attributed it to his former illness, and as he proved himself a kind husband, a good father, and a just master, his virtuous example, notwithstanding his want of activity, had worked their influence upon those who had surrounded him. His studies alone had interested him; later on, when his children grew up and drew him forcibly into their fresh and merry life, he lost some of the gravity, which had often made people wonder how a man so happy and so successful should appear so sad.

To-day, however, he had only read the first lines of the

letter, when a sudden and new life seemed to animate him; and even a blush, such as would so easily suffuse the youth's brow, rushed to the old man's cheeks. With an impatience, which was now unusual to him, he was soon putting down his son's letter, and seizing hold of the second one, he noticed a number of cuttings out of newspapers fall about; he at once put them aside in order to take into his hand a small paper turned yellow by age. He stared at it for a long time, turning it in every direction. The letter had once gone more than one long journey, that was evident, for it was covered with postage stamps from different countries. The address could hardly be read, so pale it had become, but it was written in the hasty handwriting of a lady, whilst beneath it were a few words which he recognised but too well—the words written by himself when this letter had first reached him. Years had gone by, ay, and long years they had been to him, since the day when, in the bitterness of his grief and anger, he had returned this letter unanswered—this letter, which would have told him a secret, the secret of his whole life's happiness.

His hand shook as he now broke open the seal, and a tear stood upon his grey eyelashes as he read the words which had flown from a girl's broken heart—words in which she told of her great sacrifice, words in which she wished him farewell, words which sounded like a cry for help. . . . The old man's head sank upon his breast, as if all the woe of that time had once more awakened there, and he saw, with a bitter sorrow, that it had lain in his hands to make both their lives different from what they had been. He now understood what had remained an enigma to him, and that through his own fault. For a while there also arose an angry thought against her who had contributed to his deception; but had he a right to accuse

others after having sinned so grievously himself against his love?

With an avenging power now awoke in his breast the love he had so misunderstood—so wilfully thrown to the winds. He saw her once more before him, that beautiful girl, as she came to him in the glad and hopeful spring of her life. He saw the bow-window opening out upon the Rhine, saw himself sitting by her, the vine encircling their heads, sitting as they had sat during those long and happy hours of their youth, their souls united in one great harmony, which no discord, they then thought, could destroy for time or for eternity. He saw them once more, those deep blue eyes, for which he had thought no sacrifice too great, for which he had thought himself willing to give up everything. Once more he remembered that act of daring imprudence, by which he had held her for a few minutes in his arms, defying time and space. Again she appeared: she was standing before him in all the agony of her woe, with purity on her forehead and love for him in her eyes. He had believed in her during a few passing hours, and then, for the second time, and with less excuse, he had doubted, and had left her without protection to bear her bitter sorrow alone.

Wasn't it Dahnow who said that "it was easy to believe for him who chose to do so?"

And now the direst pain which can fall upon a man's heart fell upon his—he knew that he had destroyed his own happiness, because he had not been strong enough to save it from shipwreck. He had lost his love; and his energy and his youthful dream had turned to nought. The grey-haired man recognised that his life had been a mistake, and that a great waste had been created in his heart. In bitter contrition and in passionate love, a name passed his lips which had not visited them many a long year.

"Nora! Nora!" he cried. It seemed to him that with that name he could recall youth, life, and love—and he raised his head and listened. . . . But it was only a loud knocking on the window-panes, only a fair curly head, and two small hands which were clutching hold, in nervous excitement, of the window-sill.

"Grandpapa! do take me in, or else I shall fall!" sounded forth in a childish voice. "I've been knocking such a long time, and you did not hear me." The audacious little boy had scrambled up by the trelliswork to his grandpapa's window. The latter terrified, and brought back to his senses, pulled in the child, who clutched hold of his grandfather's neck, with forebodings of a scolding. But a warm embrace from the little fellow relieved the old man's heart of the weight which had lain upon it. It was his own child's child, the messenger of the present which freed him from the love of the past. It made him feel so old too, and he thought it would, indeed, be a vain regret to think of past love, now that a second race was already stamping it away with its merry little feet.

Still holding the boy in his arms, he looked down upon the group below. There was his wife, who had been a faithful and loving companion to him, there were the children she had given him, all worthy of bearing his name; there was his home so beautiful and yet so cosy! And seeing all this, he asked himself whether it would be fair to quarrel with the life which had given him so much? Yet, do what he would, there arose beside that picture of happiness the dread vision of a woman living behind cloister walls; a woman whose happiness he had destroyed. Once in his youth he had wished to save her from this lot, and it was he himself who, with a strange irony, had led her to it. But was it really a broken heart

which stood before him accusing him? Had the road been so bitter, that she had found a home nowhere else?

Curt turned away from the sunny picture, and once more took up his son's letter, but he kept a tight hold of the merry little lad on his knee, as if by the power of childhood he could chase away all darker emotions. His son's letter ran thus—"Allow me, my dear father, to tell you of an event which has lately taken place, and which you will better understand than I, interested as I was in it. The enclosed letter, which was confided to me, will serve to explain everything, and will tell you the name of the person I am speaking of. In order to make the matter clear to you, I must, as the children say, begin at the very beginning.

"You know that our monastery here is only recently established, and that we are much supported in our work by a convent of earlier date. I had already heard that the Mother Superior, who had founded this convent years ago, had had incredible difficulties to surmount in order to attain her object. She was renowned as a very remarkable woman, and on account of her peculiar talent for organisation, she was employed by her order to superintend the convents placed in the most precarious and difficult circumstances. It was, moreover, said that this country was her home. For many years she had worked here in the most active and devoted manner towards the education of children, the growth of Christian instruction, the care of the sick, in short, in every act of mercy. People spoke loudly of her holiness and of her devotion, and her superiors could not sufficiently praise the prudence of her government, the greatness of her science, and the indefatigable constancy she displayed. I was therefore delighted when one day I was ordered to visit her on something relating to business. I sent in

my name by a French lay sister, who executed it in the barbarous way a Frenchwoman alone can do. As soon as I appeared before the Mother Superior, a tall and stately woman who must have had beautiful features in her youth, she left me no time to enter upon the subject of my commission, but said at once 'You must be a Degenthal!' (this, in the purest German), 'I never saw so strong a likeness before! You are exactly as your father was at your age!' And as I answered affirmatively, she added, 'Yes, and the voice too! I knew him very well—your father! Tell me, he is alive still, is he not?'

"You may imagine, dear father, how gladly I told her that indeed we had the joy of possessing you still. And it did me all the good in the world to find some one who had a link with my dear belongings at home. She bid me tell her all about you, about my mother, and about my brothers and sisters. She seemed to be acquainted with all the elder members of the family, and asked after my grandmother and the chaplain. Then I had to enter into all the details of your life, dear father, and to tell her how happy you made those who surrounded you, how good you were to your belongings, and how much happiness you drew from your studies. 'Yes, his mind was always bent upon great and noble things,' she then said, as if to herself.

"I asked her if she had any message for you, and under what name I should send it? 'Oh, he will hardly remember me,' she added evasively. 'We nuns break off so completely with the world that we even change our names. I should have to go back too far with my long life for me to be able to recall myself to his mind. But it has given me great pleasure to see you, and I hope to do so often, as our work lies in the same direction.'

"Her language and her whole manner made me feel

sure that she had once lived in the best society. You will, perhaps, guess who she was. For my part, I can only say that, seeing her often, as I saw her later on, my respect and admiration for this remarkable woman grew daily greater.

"All this happened during the course of last winter. In the spring there broke out a fearful epidemic, such as these countries are visited by, and when this happens, we have, as you may imagine, to make use of all the forces we possess. The reverend mother was incomparable; not only in her personal tending of the sufferers, but also in her excellent organisation of the nurses under her. The poor and the sick venerated her like a saint, and considered themselves saved upon her mere appearance in their dwellings. The whole town felt bound in gratitude towards her for the intelligence and the indefatigable energy with which she also brought into use some of the preventive measures, which are so often neglected here. She was soon called away to another part of the country where sisters of the community were required. Others besought her to come and give them some of her excellent advice for organising the manner of nursing. So long as it was possible to her, she complied with all these wishes, and hastened also to visit the various convents of her order, so that she might inspire them with courage, and bring them spiritual consolation.

"She was generally obliged, on account of the state of the roads, to undertake these journeys on horseback. I often met her thus, and was surprised at the courage and security with which so old a nun could ride a horse. Having made a remark to that effect, she answered with a smile that she had ridden much in her childhood and youth, and added, 'After all, it has been turned to some good account at last.' I was sent away on a missionary expedition which kept me absent during a few weeks, and on my return I found that the terrible disease had some-

what given way; but I also learned, to my deep sorrow, that the reverend mother had at last succumbed beneath the heavy burden she had laid upon her own shoulders, and that she was seriously ill. Shortly afterwards, she sent me word that she wished to see me. I, of course, hastened to obey her commands, and although she received me with her usual amiability, I was terrified to see what a sudden change had come over her. She lay in the convent garden, her head sunk among pillows, and an assistant sister at her side.

"'You see how I am obliged to let myself be nursed,' she said. 'But I have not sent for you in order to assist me spiritually, for I must own that Father Degenthal is not quite venerable enough as yet for an old woman like myself.' She said this jestingly, for she was ever cheerful in her manner. 'I have asked you to come in order to do me a favour, which will make you think me rather inconsequent. Will you, after all, send a message from me to your father? We knew each other long years ago; a strange destiny brought us together as children, and your grandmother showed great kindness to my parents and to myself. Later on, a misunderstanding took place, which, though through no fault of ours, was never explained away; I should not like to leave this earth with this misunderstanding unexplained. Your unexpected presence here seems particularly providential to me; the Almighty is so good! Send this letter to your father,' she said, giving me the enclosed packet, 'he will know whom it comes from, and when he has read all, his judgment will probably be different from what it was at that time.'

"In saying this her voice sounded peculiarly sad, and some powerful memory seemed to overcome her, for she was silent, and, as if lost in thought, seemed to have forgotten my very presence. Suddenly, however, she looked

up at me, and said, with that indescribable charm of manner and of expression which so essentially belonged to her, 'Now, just see how even an old nun, like myself, clings to the earth, and in her last days upon it cannot tear herself away from its memories. I am sure it seems strange to you, young as you are, that it should be so; for in youth old age is to us something so distant, so incomprehensible, that we fancy our whole being will change as soon as old age comes over us. But we remain human, thoroughly human, in our feelings and our thoughts until our last breath. We only understand this when we are old, and when the years gone by appear so short to us, that all we have lived through in our youth stands vividly and fresh before us, although really a long life separates us from those days.' She spoke reflectively, and her words worked powerfully upon me, so that I am able to repeat them to you now exactly as she said them.

"She continued: 'I would also like to send your mother a sign of remembrance, the affectionate greeting of a former school friend. I knew long ago that your mother would be happy. She once gave me a proof of the most touching fidelity which I have never forgotten, and which I am sure God recompensed by giving her a happiness she so thoroughly deserved.' She paused awhile. 'But I have also been happy—happy to my whole heart's content—tell your father that! There was much that was beautiful in the life God granted me, and I have loved it, and been thankful to Him for it unto the last. He gave me great happiness in my youth at one time, and it was certainly better that all should have happened as it did, for thus we have each of us fulfilled our mission, better than we should have done had everything gone as we wished. Our Saviour never left a sorrow without its accompanying comfort, never allowed darkness to come without one bright ray

of sunshine. It was well that He led my heart to Himself alone, giving me thus the grace to devote myself to a great many, and to work in a large field. Yes, it was well that He should have given the homeless one a home in His own tents. It is possible that any other earthly home would have become too narrow in time. It was well also that He should have sent you to-day to me,' she said, taking my hand, 'I am so glad to have seen you. It is a great blessing that the Lord should have called you so early to serve Him alone. I have known some souls which could at once follow so beautiful a vocation; but for me, restless and earthly of heart as I was, I had first of all to be led by other roads.' 'But the victory is all the finer,' I said. 'The greater the struggle the greater the honour.' 'Do you really think so?' she answered with a friendly smile, 'that would be a comfort for many a false step. But you are right, everything has its object when sent by God. And now, tell me about your own doings; I am so tired of inactivity that I should be glad to hear of your work, that is, if you can spare me a little more time.'

"I complied with her desire, and told her all about our last journey, its results, and what had still to be done. She listened with the greatest attention, now and then throwing in a word, so clear, so instructive, and so intended to spur me on, that I saw how completely her soul was filled with great thoughts, and solely occupied with her vocation. And, indeed, as she spoke, it struck me that a mere earthly house would soon become too narrow for her.

"'I shall see nothing more of that,' she said, as I told her of our projects for the immediate future. 'They insist upon sending me to our *Maison Mère* on account of my health. I shall have to give way, although it will be a great sacrifice to me to desert my work here; but, as aforesaid, I belong to the last to those people who can take

root nowhere. And yet I should have liked to rest where my mother was born.'

"I then remembered that she generally passed for an American here, although I could not put that together with her knowing you. She must have travelled a great deal, however, for she spoke every European language, and seemed to know every European country. My time was unfortunately up, and I arose, begging her to allow me to call again. She seemed to reflect awhile, and then said: 'No; we will part to-day, my young friend. Your time is precious, and my last days must also be completely devoted to preparing myself for the supreme hour of death. You know I told you that we remain so human to the end, and even now past remembrances crowd upon my old brain. Now, that I have done what I could to clear that past, I would like these thoughts to make way for higher and better ones. . . . I think I was not wrong in doing this, it will perhaps do others good, and it was kind and merciful of God to have sent you to me. Come, now, and receive, as farewell, the blessing of an old woman—for you, for him, for your whole household,' she said; and I, bending before her, felt her hand placed upon my head. 'It was thus that my dying mother also blessed your father,' she said gently, 'and I do it with the same deep feeling. It was a blessing after all that our paths should have met.'

"These were the last words that I heard from her lips, and each one of them has impressed itself deeply upon my soul, for they seem specially to be meant for you, my dear father. I saw her no more, not because she undertook the projected journey to France, but because the Lord granted her her last wish. Her illness made such rapid progress that she died before the journey could be undertaken. We lost her a few weeks after I had seen her, to the in-

describable sorrow of all those who had known her. Her spiritual daughters mourned for her as for their own mother, and so did also the orphans confided to her care, the poor she had assisted, and the sick she had nursed. The last services she had rendered to all were too recent not to bring with them public admiration and notice. Both temporal and spiritual corporations were anxious to show her memory all kind of respect. Had she occupied a high rank in society, it would have been impossible to receive greater honours than those which were awarded to the simple nun. In order to give you an idea of all she did, and of the general veneration she enjoyed, I enclose some of the notices which appeared about her in the newspapers, but this is only a small part of the fame she has left behind her. I consider it myself as a blessing to have met her, and I shall never forget the impression made upon me by that powerful nature, with a heart so warm for the earth, and a soul so completely devoted to heaven."

Thus wrote Curt's son, with all the enthusiasm of youth, and as the aged man read these lines he breathed more freely. No, the description of this woman had nothing to do with the pale and threatening ghost his own imagination had conjured up! This was no broken destiny, and her fresh and active life which had spread itself so bountifully around, and had, unto its last breath, found the earth beautiful, was not one which claimed back from him its lost happiness. He was glad to think, too, that the mistake which had divided their lives had not been only a mistake; it had been also providential. The little boy on his knee had turned about his curly head more than once whilst his grandfather was reading this long letter. But now his comparative patience gave way, and pulling at Curt's sleeve, he said, as the old man continued

staring at the paper before him, "Grandpapa, have you not *yet* come to the end?"

"Yes, child, to the end!" said Curt, speaking gently, as if to himself, "arrived at the end as all does here below—youth, love, and life. But it was a good end, after all." He could not yet say as she had done, "that it was better so," but he did say that it was well. And rising he felt that a great load had fallen from him; he was freed from the sorrow which had weighed upon his whole life; she had been right, her last message had done good to another.

The little boy looked up in surprise, and watched his grandfather laying the papers and letters together with a careful and caressing hand. The old man smiled as he did so, remembering how that same letter had once reached him with very different reports about her, and how the woman whom he thought had sunk so low had now soared far above him. The child turned up his little nose, and wondered what grandpapa was about as he opened a secret spring in his writing-desk, and, standing on tip-toe, he saw grandpapa place the letters in a drawer, and then take out of the same a small and not very costly piece of jewellery, a heart in pearls, which he once more hung on his watch-chain, where long, long ago a child's hand had placed it. She had been true to her last breath, he would not be less so. But as he held this little treasure in his hand, the whole scene came vividly before him,—he saw his mother once more as she sat there and spoke those severe words which had pained him so at the time, and again he heard the chaplain's gentle and soothing answer. But his thoughts were cut short by the whole legion of his dear ones rushing into the room. "As one messenger did not suffice, papa, we've come to fetch you in a body; Richard shall not keep you to himself with his long letter," they cried. His wife came up to him, and, looking

anxiously into his face, she asked, "There was no bad news in the letter, was there?"

"No, no; on the contrary, it was a good, dear letter," he said, speaking from the depths of his heart.

"Then, why do you shut yourself up away from us? We are so happy all together, and yet we miss you terribly," said Lily in a somewhat reproachful tone.

"Richard sent me news of some one about whom I thought I should never hear anything again. It was a last message, a parting remembrance. But we," he added, drawing his wife towards him, "we shall remain still a long time with each other, so God will, and these last days will be the best and happiest we have yet spent together. God has blessed us with many a joy, and He has made all come well. . . . Nora, the circus-rider's daughter, Nora also sent you a last word of love and gratitude. She was more than happy, she was holy!"

God's flowers can bloom upon every soil.

THE END.

Ballantyne Press
BALLANTYNE, HANSON AND CO.
EDINBURGH AND LONDON